



tools for

# AGENCY-LED ASSET MAPPING

*with communities*

**Asset mapping is the process of identifying and documenting the skill, capacities, resources, and priorities within any community.**

When done with the intention of nurturing “people-powered” local action and innovation, this practice can generate powerful change by revealing the abundant resources that community members can use to create their desired futures, with the support of local institutions.

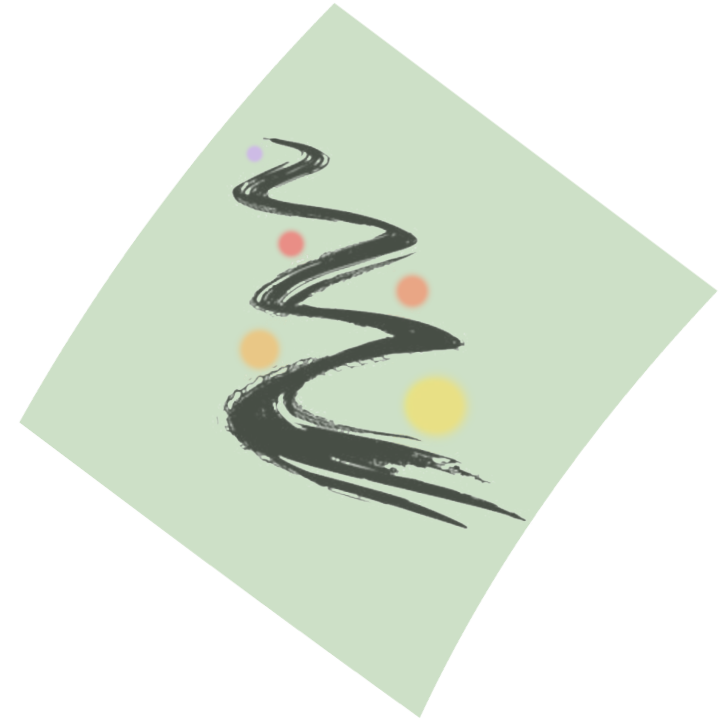
**Local institutions like libraries and museums can play an important role as catalysts for resident action and asset discovery.** A powerful first step of catalyzing this change is to offer support for residents to begin discovering the abundant, often hidden assets and resources within reach locally.

This toolkit was designed specifically for staff and leaders of local organizations seeking to come alongside residents as they work to improve their lives and neighborhoods.

**There is no one way to map assets.** It can take as many forms as there are groups, communities, and situations across the world. This practice was named formally by Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) founders John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann as a recommended practice for those seeking to support healthier, stronger communities after they studied the successful practices of community members in neighborhoods across the country.

## Agency-Led Asset-Mapping Tools in this document:

1. Agency-Led Asset Mapping
2. Listening Campaign





Community members discovering local water-related assets in Milwaukee, WI.  
Source: The Haggerty Museum of Art



## FOUR PURPOSES OF ASSET MAPPING

The following are four essential reasons to invest time and resources in engaging community members to map local assets:

1. **Reveal and discover or uncover the strengths of a community, especially its residents and their associational life.** There are many processes and places that highlight communities' physical strengths, civic community, institutions, or resources, but very few that lift up residents and their informal associations. When we're working on strengthening communities, residents and their associations are often the most powerful levers. Asset mapping is a valuable process to start to reveal them.
2. **Develop a sense of empowerment and community pride among participants.** It is rare that participants in this process will not say something like, "I felt so proud to live here. I'm overwhelmed with opportunity and possibility." Through this process itself, you'll develop a sense of empowerment for the people who participate.
3. **Provide real data for people to imagine the action that they can take as a community.** This is a blend of feeling good about the community and what it has to offer, but also imagining what action people should take. Asset mapping is a tool for shifting power in order to take action. If this process doesn't lead to those two things, it is a theoretical, academic exercise.
4. **Guide future relationship building that can further discover and connect assets,** creating even more community power.

As ABCD Faculty Ron Dwyer-Voss points out, **"At the end of the day, asset mapping is about power and about getting power into the hands of residents and associations in a community,** so that they can imagine and take the action that they want to take in their community. These purposes are very resident-centered." ("Agency-Led Asset Mapping CCI Webinar," 2020)

It's important to note that this practice has been and continues to be performed informally by everyday community members as a way to answer the question "What do we already have to achieve the change we wish to see?"

As Cormac Russell (2015) writes:

*Asset Mapping involves generating a map or inventory of the capacities, skills and talents of individuals, associations, organizations, the natural and built environment, and local economy (inclusive of its gift economy).*

**The Asset Mapping process is not about data collection. It is about connecting people to their neighbors and their ecology and economy on the basis of their assets and priorities.** It is about collective-realization, collective-empowerment and connectorship.

**It is therefore vital that connectors, residents and their associations do the Asset Mapping themselves** so that they i) build new relationships, ii) learn more about the contributions and talents of community members, and iii) identify potential linkages between different assets.

As institutions that are often well trusted and viewed by community members as repositories of knowledge, information, and culture, libraries and museums are uniquely well positioned to play the role of enabling the community to access information and resources by taking the initiative to lead asset-mapping processes.

## TWO PROCESSES

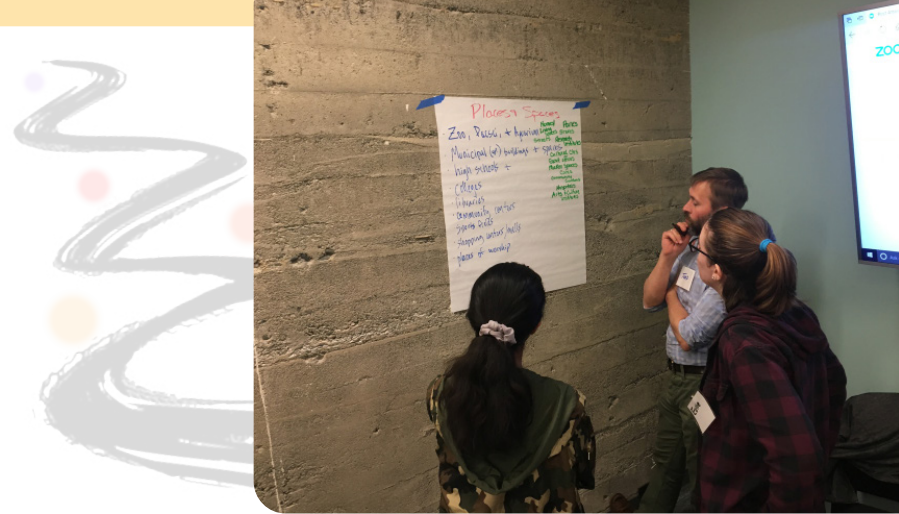
The following two processes provide a path of action that library and museum staff can step into. They are designed to enable organizational staff to play a facilitative, supportive, connective role while creating space for residents and their capacities to take center stage.



An **Agency-Led Asset-Mapping** event is a relatively simple, one-event process for engaging community members in an asset-mapping and action-identification process. Use this to kick off your initial engagement with residents and repeatedly to refresh and expand engagement and learning; to identify resident leaders, connectors, and collaborators; and to generate concrete knowledge of diverse local assets to be used to increase community well-being.



A **Listening Campaign** is a more prolonged, 6- to 8-week process. It incorporates learning conversations, a classic organizing tool, alongside the agency-led asset-mapping tool. Listening campaigns offer a way for organizations to learn about their community, uncover assets, and build strong relationships while steadily identifying what local issues or ideas community members care about most and are most ready to act on.



Asset mapping process held with community members and partners, hosted by the Woodland Park Zoo and Seattle Youth Climate Action Network. Source: Woodland Park Zoo

These processes can be used as an initial immersion for you and fellow staff of your organization into an asset-based, resident-centered way of thinking and working or to complement your existing community-building work. Going forward, you can repeat these processes periodically as you build upon the learnings of these first steps.

Both of these processes offer rich opportunities to both broaden and deepen your relationships with others who share your and your organization's passion for unlocking, connecting, and mobilizing local abundance while nurturing the self-determination of residents and neighborhoods.

*We encourage you to adapt and adjust these tools within the realities of your own unique context and to play freely with ways to make them more fun, inclusive, and meaningful!*

# AGENCY-LED ASSET MAPPING

**Time Required:** 60–90 min

**This process is a model for agencies facilitating asset mapping with a focus on the purposes and importance of resident participation.**

Use it to kick off your initial engagement with residents and repeatedly to refresh and expand engagement and learning; to identify resident leaders, connectors, and collaborators; and to generate concrete knowledge of diverse local assets to be used to increase community well-being.

*This tool is explained in depth in a webinar created for the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative led by ABCD Institute Faculty Ron Dwyer-Voss, who will be quoted throughout. To access the webinar and its materials, see the box to the right.*

## A HELPING ROLE

The ultimate goal of asset mapping is to engage and mobilize residents to lead local change. What, then, is the role of institutions? There is an extremely valuable role local institutions play. Four primary steps in this process that institutions like libraries and museums can be particularly helpful in facilitating are as follows:

- 1. Convening and hosting.** Often an institution, especially a library or a museum, is a trusted entity in the community. If it convenes and hosts an event, people often trust that it will be worth their time.
- 2. Framing what is important** by outlining “What issue or possibility is the group addressing?” while keeping the focus on resident/community strengths. Without this, the group’s focus can easily wander.
- 3. Facilitating the mapping.** By taking on the role of facilitator of the asset mapping, agency staff can free up residents to fully participate, contribute their knowledge, and enjoy the experience.
- 4. Helping residents determine what action they want to take.** Agency staff can frame and gently direct the conversation to help community members discover where they have the most energy and capacity to take action as next steps.



**webinar:** “Asset Mapping for Community Catalyst Agencies”



Presented by Ron Dwyer-Voss of the ABCD Institute, [this webinar](#) presents an in-depth explanation of an agency-led asset mapping process along with a story of practice by Danté DiSabatino of the Woodland Park Zoo and the Seattle Youth Climate Action Network.

Runtime: 55:37 min

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: [SLIDES](#) | [TRANSCRIPT](#)

## PHASE 1: PLAN, INVITE, PREPARE THE SPACE

- 1. Create a planning team** of other community-centered staff as well as any individual residents, associational representatives, or partner organizations. Set a date and work with as many individuals who are well connected in the community to issue direct invitations to community members.



The following are “pro tips” from Ron Dwyer-Voss for this phase:

*“Convening and hosting is an important role that agencies can play—in other words, picking a place, calling people and groups together, being facilitators of the process. Even though institutions might be physically in a community, the individuals who work there might be from outside the community. It can be helpful to have these staff facilitating, issuing the event invitations, and actively reaching out to community members.*

*[For example, I helped at] a couple of recent asset-mapping events at public health agencies. They often had coalitions of other agencies that are involved: social services, youth development, the usual suspects. We had them think about “Who are the residents in your community who are connector-leaders?” Meaning, people who are connected to lots of other residents. They all know somebody.*

Invite them, but not through a mass email—through a direct invitation. When somebody they know calls a community member and says, “I’m part of this process. I’m interested in making a community a healthier place and there’s going to be this fun event where we look at the assets of the community. Do you want to come with me?” then people come. When they get an email, they don’t come. For asset mapping, it’s important to do direct invitations and follow up.

Additionally, when the process has the endorsement of the library or museum or school behind it, people tend to trust that their individual relationship with that person they’re inviting and with the host makes it a worthwhile decision to leave home that night and attend the event.

Then all the logistics [of institutions hosting] are just so important. These are all things that could often be obstacles initially to residents pulling this off themselves that institutions can clear the way forward and create a space where residents can really engage.

Try to make sure there are two or three residents of the community for every agency’s staff person who’s there. That ratio helps create some power balance and really helps the group get to some authentic and sincere sharing all around.”

(Dwyer-Voss)

## 2. Gather materials.

- Flip charts
- Thick markers
- Tape (blue painter’s tape is often best)
- A pleasant-sounding bell or timer



Optional but recommended: Food/refreshments  
Festive/beautiful decor

## 3. Prepare the space.

Set up asset categories on large flip charts around the room, one for each asset category with space around each flip chart for people to congregate and write on it together.

Asset categories: Individuals, Associations, Institutions, Physical Assets, Local Economy, Cultural Stories.



## PHASE 2: WELCOME AND FRAMING

**1. Welcome** everyone and share a brief statement about why you are gathered. Explain that we all bring special gifts to any group of which we are a member. And if we recognize each other’s gifts, we can creatively combine them to make the team stronger and more successful.

Other items you may wish to include in an opening:

- A land acknowledgment
- Acknowledge any special contributions, and co-hosts
- Quickly review the flow of events for the evening
- Encourage everyone to take care of themselves as needed throughout the gathering, such as taking bio-breaks for food/drink/restroom
- Invite everyone to turn off or silence cell-phones and to practice being fully present in the room

**2. Framing** From the webinar: “The framing that I recommend is:



- Point out and help people understand that every community has assets and that needs never really solved the problem, so this process is about identifying the things that we might use to create solutions and to create the community we want. It’s always helpful.**
- People always appreciate hearing that this is something that communities around the world have found can be empowering and that it leads to action that has given them some independence from outside forces or decisions. You don’t have to wait on the government to do something or an agency to do something once you have an asset map. It’s reassuring for a lot of folks that all kinds of communities around the world have done this process.**

**c. Review the six asset areas and clarify their definitions.** This includes making sure people understand the difference between an institution and association, the idea that residents are filled with assets, and the definitions of the physical environment, local exchange and economy, and culture and stories. (I sometimes use slides, but sometimes I'm in a machine shop or a church basement and we just might have a simple handout with a couple bullet points.) See slide deck linked on Page 2 for asset definitions.

**d. Have people think about the boundaries of the area, in maps.** In asset mapping, if you're focused on a particular neighborhood, it can be really deep and rich. I've even done it where we actually take part of the evening, or if it's a Saturday, and have folks go out and walk around for half an hour with their little chart of the assets and see what they see, especially if it's a lot of adults because they mostly drive by these assets and it is really powerful to see things that they haven't seen.

*By being clear on the boundaries, people are working on the same page. Sometimes [the focus is] a whole city, so it's hard to go in as much depth. In that case, you want to provide some topical boundaries. Dante's example [from Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle] will speak to that. They talked about 'What are the assets in our state for climate action?'*

## PHASE 3: MAP THE ASSETS

**1. Divide everyone into six groups and assign each group an asset category.** Propose silent time to allow everyone the opportunity to think about and write their own gifts of the head, hands, heart, and human connection on their handout.

**2. Have groups fill in each asset category.** Tell the group, "Take the next 5 or 6 minutes as a group to write all the assets in that category that can be found in the defined boundaries that we just talked about."

 *"For the 'Individuals' asset category, participants don't need to worry about naming every person in their neighborhood. Rather, have them focus on connector leaders after you share a little bit about what kind of leaders those people are."*

**Connectors** are "people-lovers" who are well known, trusted, and tend to have a very large network in their network and community. They rarely play formal leadership roles and prefer to play the role of match-maker, listener, convener, and repositories of information about the good in their neighbors and community. (See [Handout on Connectors](#).)



- The gifts of local residents: hopes, concerns, and talents.
- Everyone has something to offer.
- ABCD especially seeks to include traditionally excluded people.
- The only asset in every success story.



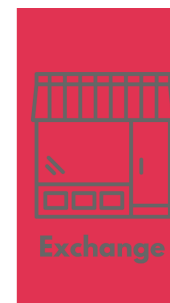
- Small, informal groups of people.
- Individuals choose to give their gifts.
- Power comes from the pooling of individual gifts.
- Clubs, groups, unnamed affiliations.



- Three types: for profit, not-for-profit, and governmental.
- Formally structured and work toward repeatable goals.
- Individuals are paid for their work.
- Resource abundant.



- Spaces and places within the community.
- On the earth and under the earth.
- Human made and existing in nature.



- Exchanges of gifts and productive work.
- Things that are bought, sold, shared, given, traded, and bartered.
- Sometimes termed local economy.



- Captures when the community was / is at its best.
- Stories, traditions, practices that bring people together.
- Represents what's important to people.




Source: [slides](#), "Asset-Mapping for Community Catalyst Agencies" webinar



Walk around the room and help people think about what this category is, as needed.

After 5 minutes, ring a bell and have everyone in the room rotate to the next category. The people who are doing Individuals will go to Associations, and those doing Associations will go to Institutions, and so on.


Repeat these rotations until all groups have added to all asset categories. After about the third rounds, you can begin to shorten the time to 4 and 3 minutes because the group will simply read what other people have already written and add to it.

 *“By now, you’ve usually got two to four flip sheets full of stuff. And you can start to point out to them that there are many assets that fit in many categories. For instance, a school is a physical space that is also an institution. And often at the school there are associations like, you know, teacher group or a running club.”*

**3. Rotate the groups one last time.** Each group should now arrive at the category where they started. Ask them to read what’s on the sheet and see what’s been added that wasn’t there 20 minutes ago.


**4. Ask a member of each group to read out the assets in their category.** Have the group help with recategorizing assets as you go, and highlight that many assets appear in more than one area—for instance, correcting an asset labeled as an association to an institution. (This will feel long and redundant as a facilitator—stick with it. There is a cumulative effect of hearing all the strengths of one’s community for 20 minutes.)

**5. Ask for the group’s reactions once all the assets have been read and refined.**

 *“Most of the time, they’ll share some sense of amazement about community pride in their town. They’ll use words like ‘abundance’ and ‘overwhelmed with goodness,’ ‘opportunity,’ and that they started thinking of what they want for their community in terms of what they have, to get what they want for their community.”*

## PHASE 4: ACTION BRAINSTORMING


**1. Brainstorm action ideas.** Ask people to return to their tables in whatever group formation they prefer and ask them, “What could we do with what we have to \_\_\_[see note below]\_\_\_?” \*

 \* *“When an agency or institution is facilitating, they usually have something they need to get done. With these public health groups I was talking about, they wanted to have a conversation with residents about ‘How can we use our assets to make them healthier?’ One of them, their health goal was ‘to make their community child-amazing,’ which I thought was pretty cool.*

*With straight-up community organizing and communication, you can just leave it as broad as, ‘What can we do with what we have to strengthen our community?’ And it can go a lot of directions. I’ve done that before.”*

**2. Identify two or three of the most exciting ideas.** After about 10 minutes, ask the groups to identify two or three ideas from their discussion that they are particularly excited about, then present those ideas along with a short description written on a piece of paper and tape the paper to a wall. (The individual action papers should be placed far enough apart that different groups of people can gather at them in the next step.)

**3. Individuals choose an action.** Ask the whole room to think about which actions that they want to work on and contribute their gifts to. Then invite participants to stand next to the piece of paper with the action idea they want to work on. Remind participants, “It is OK to not stand—honor your limits.)

 *“A key part of ABCD is to not try to talk people into working on something that they don’t connect with or feel they can contribute to. The idea here is to invite people to look at these ideas and say, ‘What would you want to work on?’ and to relieve some of the burden of having to ‘work on the most important thing,’ because that thing is often overwhelming.*


For example, someone may say, 'Let's reduce gang violence.' 'Well, I don't know how to reduce gang violence. But I do know how to go and make that vacant lot a beautiful place, and I want to contribute to that because I like gardening.' What you find is that people filter out.

We also remind people it's okay not to go stand by an idea, to honor your limits if you're not in a place to do that. Or if you want to stand by an idea and say, 'This isn't something I can work on, but I want to stay connected to it when I can.'

#### 4. Groups identify assets to use for their chosen action.


Give each group a flip chart sheet to use to identify the assets they might use to implement their action and make the change they want to make.

Also have them write down when and where they are meeting next to plan/implement. Remind participants that learning conversations and relationship building with assets is an early part of any successful action.

 "For groups who say, 'We're going to meet next week,' I'll say, 'Okay, maybe. But who's not here, and can you talk to them by next week? And if not, then maybe meet in three weeks because there's a key step in here, which is relationship-building with the assets you need before you go further.'"

#### 5. Share-outs and optional group-shifting.

Have each action team share out and give participants an opportunity to change teams or add their name to a team.


 "Sometimes at this point, when a group says, 'Okay, we're working on making Roderick Neighborhood more walkable so people are out walking more because that'll make us healthier. And there's a long old history of this that went away at a certain point. We want to recover that and we think these assets will do it and here's our plan.' Somebody who was working on something else might say, 'Actually that's got someone I want to work on.' So it's very much like Open Space. But it takes some permission giving as you go through as the facilitator."

#### 6. Celebrate and let everyone know when and how follow-up will happen.



### PHASE 5: FOLLOW-UP AND NEXT STEPS

Send all participants the records of the meeting as a follow-up via the most appropriate communication channels.

 "A member might read the follow-up and say, 'So, just because I was really into the walking group. But later, I get the typed up flip charts and the action plans and thought, 'I really want to work on that dirt bike course for kids as well.' So I'm going to go to that meeting.' So being transparent is good."

After the process, two things usually happen:

- **People will come back later after they have taken some action to reconvent, refresh, and update their map.** They have more community partners and relationships now, so it makes sense to bring folks in and ask, "Is our map current?" "Here's another thing we have thought of that we want to add to it," and then, "What's that mean for our action and going forward?" In this way, asset mapping becomes a cycle.
- **A group may spin off and become a new group** as a result of seeing the assets in the community and finding others who share their interest or idea. For example, "The Gardening Group" forms because they saw vacant lots, people gardening, and that people are interested in healthy food but didn't have great grocery store access—so they embark on that project using these assets. They then may perform more asset mapping and circulate around the community to find others who were also interested.

You and your organization can support actions and projects that emerge from this gathering by staying in touch with the groups and offering resources, meeting space, helpful connections, or other assets you have along the way. This could include an offer to host future asset-mapping sessions as the projects and relationships formed at this gathering evolve and grow.



Ron Dwyer-Voss shares a few closing thoughts on the period following a community asset-mapping session:

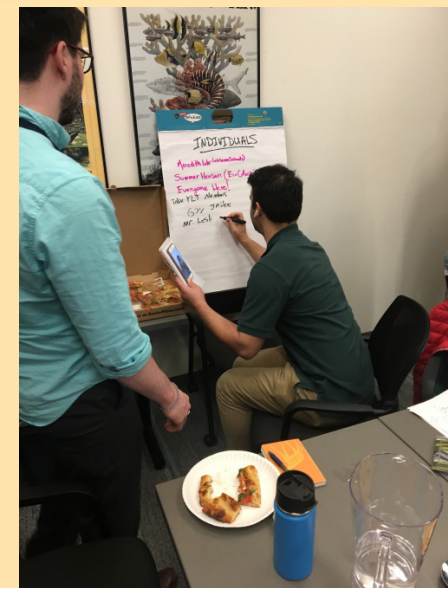
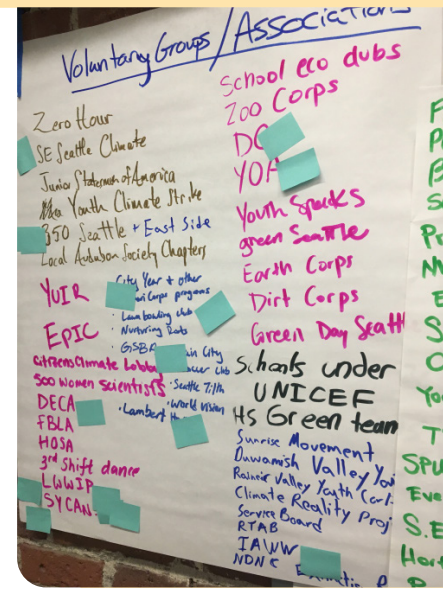
*Remember that asset mapping is a beginning of a process.*

*It's not just extractive data gathering for agencies to find out things and then go use them. That would be really inappropriate use of it. But it's a beginning of relationship building and helping folks then determine some direction that they can take, that the agency is facilitating might partner with them on.*

*It's not uncommon, in my experience, for, out of an asset-mapping session, several groups to move forward, some of which connect with what the facilitating agency wants to do and then they've stayed connected—others which don't connect, and that's fine. What happens is those folks [whose project may not connect] do remember that you, the library, or the Chamber of Commerce, or the department, which was supposed to this helped them connect that way, and it creates a deeper relationship with the group. But you don't have to pursue every project that comes out of it, and just being open about that is important.*

*But definitely don't do [asset mapping with community members] if you don't think you have any time to follow up with a relationship.*

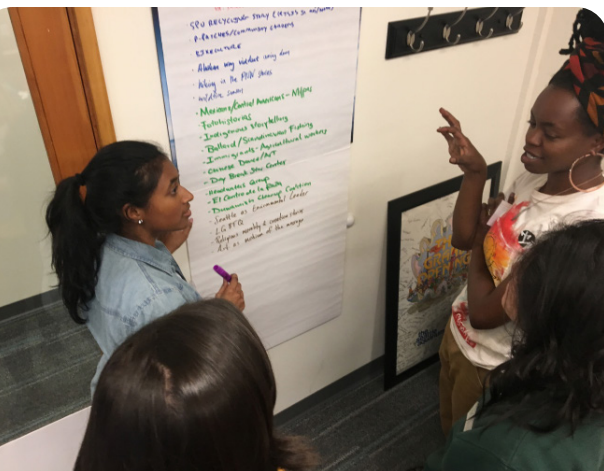
**It can also be useful to conduct an Institutional Asset-Mapping exercise for your own institution** either before or shortly after hosting this gathering so that you can have as much knowledge as possible about the resources your institution can freely offer to residents. (See "Tool #3: Mapping Institutional Assets" from the CCI Toolkit.)



Asset-mapping process held with community members and partners, hosted by the Woodland Park Zoo and Seattle Youth Climate Action Network. Source: Woodland Park Zoo



Source: Woodland Park Zoo



# LISTENING CAMPAIGN

Source: Ron Dwyer-Voss, ABCD Institute & Pacific Community Solutions

**Time Required:** 6–8 weeks

**A listening campaign is a powerful process that institutions like libraries and museums can use to catalyze community-driven change that emerges from the existing capacities, priorities, and action of local residents and their associations.**

For institutions like libraries or museums that are aiming to catalyze effective local change, this process provides a pathway to becoming more embedded and relevant to their communities. It provides a template for tangibly engaging with their residents, local groups, and organizations from a place of respect, humility, and faith in the abundance that exists in the community. A listening campaign will also clarify for institutions how they can best serve as a supporter, convener, investor, and ally for resident-driven local improvement and problem solving by revealing the following critical information:

- *issues that residents are already working on*
- *often hidden pre-existing networks of resident collaboration, care, interdependence, and problem solving*
- *previously unknown local assets, resources, and capacities—particularly those of residents and their groups*
- *new issues that residents care about enough to act on, and/or which local associations may be willing to join forces*

This process blends learning conversations, a classic organizing tool, with a variation of the Agency-Led Asset-Mapping method to enable organizations to learn about their community, uncover assets, and build strong relationships. It also reveals local issues or ideas community members care about most and are most ready to act on. Listening campaigns can be used to kick off a new period of engaging with one’s community or to deepen existing engagement efforts.



## PROCESS

### Overview

A team of staff from your organization (and/or partner organizations) form a Listening Team and hold a basic number of learning conversations per week for 4 weeks. For instance, if five staff members or volunteers form a team and each commit to two learning conversations per week for 4 weeks, they can create deeper connections with over 50 residents, many of whom will want to join or contribute to this effort. To culminate the campaign, the expanded team holds a party and shares what you learned with the neighbors who participated in the Learning Conversations, and see where they want to take it.

**Learning conversations** are 30- to 60-minute conversations held with someone in the community with the purpose of building a relationship. (See pp. 13-14 of this tool for learning conversation instructions.)

### 1. Preparation

**Identify and enlist your team of staff.** Invite people who have expressed or demonstrated their belief in the value of engaging with the community and are energized by the idea of “getting out” into the community. If necessary, make arrangements for them to have the liberty in their positions to devote time to the campaign in the coming weeks. You may wish to share with them materials on asset-based, resident-centered community engagement approaches, such as materials at the end of this document, or throughout the IMLS Community Catalyst Asset-Mapping Toolkit.



## 2. Team Orientation, Planning, and Launch

**Gather the team to meet.** If you like, meet at a local cafe or coffee shop to set the tone of stepping out into community. Begin by sharing the vision and purpose for the listening campaign, including any personal reasons or inspiration that motivate you.

**Next, review the specifics of a learning conversation**, that is, what they are and their purpose. Leave time for questions and discussion. If desired, you can practice learning conversations in pairs, with the rest of the team observing, and share feedback, impressions, and so on afterward. This can grow everyone's familiarity with the approach. However, try not to stress perfection, and assure the team that learning conversations are best done through simply "getting out there" to try them in the field. Clarify that conversations should be with *residents*, not staff of other organizations, because the goal is to become more aware of and supportive of the change that residents can and want to implement and of their existing skills, talents, and resources.

**Then, each person should identify one resident** they know in the community. This will be their initial conversation to grow their skills and generate referrals for future learning conversations.

This should be planned as a group so everyone does not contact the same person, such as the beloved Mrs. Johnson who comes into the museum or library with her grandkids every Thursday. This is also an opportunity to think as a group strategically about:

- Who should be talked to?
- What sections of the community should be represented in our list?
- Who is currently missing/underrepresented, etc.?

**Team members then schedule and hold initial learning conversations** in the next week (ideally) with that person and get two to three referrals at the end of the conversation by asking "Who else do you know that I should talk with?"

**Regroup** after the learning conversations to share everyone's experience, pool the references, and plan as needed who will follow up on them.

## 3. Hold 4-5 Weeks of Learning Conversations

**Over the next 4-5 weeks, team members go out to hold learning conversations** with community members and resident associational representatives. (See pp. 13-14 for learning conversation instructions.)

Below is a breakdown the 4- to 5-week campaign's typical unfolding:

**WEEK 1:** 5 team members X 2 conversations each = 10 residents listened to and connected with. Inevitably, one will say, "I want to join this" and now you have 6.

**WEEK 2:** 6 team members X 2 conversations each = 12 residents listened to and connected with. Inevitably, one will say, "I want to join this" and now you have 7.

**WEEK 3:** 7 team members X 2 conversations each = 14 residents listened to and connected with. Inevitably, one will say, "I want to join this" and now you have 8.

**WEEK 4:\*** 8 team members X 2 conversations = 16 residents listened to and connected with.

**TOTAL: 52 residents** listened to and connected with

\* An additional "WEEK 5" should be allowed for scheduling challenges or other delays. The team should also meet after 1-2 weeks of conversations to share experiences and learnings.

## 4. Regroup, Reflect, and Plan

**WEEK 5:** In week 5, the team (including residents who have joined) gathers to share notes and overall findings:

- Where and what are the gifts and assets?
- What is the story of this community?
- What feels ready to happen?
- Where were their common dreams? Concerns? Interests?
- What seems possible?

**Next, invite all the participants to an event**—party, dinner, potluck, etc., ideally to be held in no more than a month.

*Opportunities for good learning conversations grow like strawberry vines. The first conversation builds an initial list of prospects that grows as those who converse identify others who care about some aspect of the group's organizing interest.*

Mike Green

(When People Care Enough to Act, p.104)



## 5. Gather to Celebrate, Connect, and Invite Action

Within no more than a month of the last learning conversation, have the gathering with all of the residents your team met with. At the gathering

Share findings from the learning conversations.

Ask three questions:

1. What are people interested in contributing their gifts to/for?
2. Who wants to commit to what and see if there are one or two projects/efforts with energy.
3. Have those folks look at and add onto any asset map of the community with their project in mind.

Help residents commit to a next meeting. Reserve space (or on Zoom) for the next meeting.

## 6. Support Emergent Citizen Action

After the gathering, support residents to meet. Don't DO anything for them except create and hold space, keep them focused on primary assets (local and within their control) and keep the conversation directed in the asset/possibility direction instead of deficits/limitations direction.

*In this way, your organization's staff and volunteers can support community connection, which enhances the community's connection with your museum or library and helps residents co-create new realities.*



# HOSTING TIPS AND VARIATIONS

**FOOD** Food is one of the most simple and powerful community-building tools we have. Building time into events that you host for participants to enjoy a meal together, if possible, can allow time for relationship building. Join in the meal with participants and be open to natural conversations where you connect as fellow humans. Consider ordering extra and providing take-home containers. If you are meeting one-on-one, offer lunch or a beverage. Earmark part of your institutional budget for food and drink for relationship building.

**HOSPITALITY** Plan your events and conversations as if you were hosting a party or meeting with friends, with a warm spirit of welcoming, hospitality, and care for others. When hosting an event, invest in creating a joyful and beautiful decor (flowers, tablecloths, balloons or colorful posters around the room, etc.) and consider small gifts for participants (a notebook, pen, etc.). Have at least one person with an embracing personality there to welcome people as they come in and make them feel comfortable. Ensure that people from all walks of life and circumstances can attend and participate easily through wheelchair accessibility, translation (including sign language) if needed, conducting a land acknowledgment to start your event, and arranging for child care or transportation options for community members who may struggle to attend without it. Ask residents if a prayer or other ceremony would make sense to open a session.

**SAFE, EMPOWERING SPACES** Hold meetings (events or learning conversations) where community members feel comfortable and powerful. When possible, ask them to decide the location. Also, while it can be generous and positive to offer to host an asset-mapping session at your institution's location, check with well-connected community members (who will be candid with you) about any barriers involved in your institution hosting. (Some universities have a reputation for being inaccessible, over developing communities, or extractive research practices.) If a better location is found that is more welcoming or has more meaning for community members, such as a church, local restaurant, or union hall, consider offering compensation or another form of support toward that location. Help with set-up and clean-up.

**INVEST IN GIFTS** When hosting an event, hire as locally as possible (e.g., photographers, graphic recorders, food). Get references from someone you know for community members you may have already met around who you could hire for services that are building their business and would benefit from the opportunity, or are well known and loved by many community members. They may be someone who is already involved with your museum or library as a volunteer, resident advisor, or through a community project.

**COMMUNICATE CONSIDERATELY** While we typically communicate by email in the work world, community members often respond to more direct and personal methods of communication such as phone calls, texting, or other platforms like social media messenger. Learn how individuals prefer to be reached and use that method with that person.

**AVOID COLD CALLS** Where possible, reach out to community members through someone they already know. This applies to making new connections, like setting up a learning conversation. For events, communicate directly with those you already know, and try to utilize existing resident communication networks such as individual connectors or associational circles like churches, clubs, or neighborhood groups to issue invitations. If you need to contact someone you don't know directly, be sure to tell them what mutual acquaintance gave you their information and recommended you connect with them.

# Learning Conversation With Residents

Source: [When People Care Enough to Act](#) (Mike Green), pp. 103, 104 & 117

**The learning conversation is a classic community organizing and relationship-building tool.** It can be used to discover what residents care about enough to act on, how they are currently contributing to their communities while revealing residents' gifts, talents, capacities, and connections.


A learning conversation is an opportunity to build a relationship by seeking to discover motivation to act: the care that generates connection and action. Each resident has personal motivations to act and each resident association or congregation has shared motivations to act.

## GOALS OF A LEARNING CONVERSATION:

- *Develop a stronger relationship*
- *Discover motivation to act*
- *Explore mutual interest and clarify possible action steps*
- *Find more prospects*

The listener works first to understand what the person or association cares about enough to act, then asks themselves...

- *How does this person's or association's motivation to act weave them into the tapestry of our community partnership?*
- *What assets could they bring?*
- *Who else shares or compliments what they care about enough to act?*

 **TIPS:** Good manners make for good learning conversations. Meet people at times and in places that are comfortable and convenient. Be on time and take no more than the 30-60 minutes the person agreed to. Treat people respectfully and listen carefully.

Conduct the conversation singly or in a pair of inquirers. After several learning conversations, gather with other interviewers to share, summarize, and reflect on what you are learning, and revise the process if necessary.

## 1-1 Learning Conversation Notes (Example)

Name

Date

Address

Phone

e-mail

Fax

Occupation

Who suggested the contact?

1. Gifts, capacities, & skills to contribute?

2. Issues and concerns you want to work on?

3. What about (issue of concern to the ABCD community partnership)? Concerns? What should we do that you would work on?

4. Strong relationships with others (associations and institutions)

5. Possible roles in ABCD community partnership?

6. Further contacts for us to see (name and phone)?



# Learning Conversation With Associational Leaders

Source: [When People Care Enough to Act](#) (Mike Green), pp. 103, 104 & 117

**The learning conversation is a template for holding one-on-one conversations with associational representatives. These conversations will provide you with a full picture of the associations while also opening up a conversation with them that can lead to collaboration opportunities.**

What an association cares about at a particular moment may or may not be captured in its official mission statement—in many associations, formal statements may not have caught up with members' developing concerns and purposes.

Once you have identified which associations you are already connected to and which you would like to connect to, learning conversations are an excellent way to go deeper in learning the assets and contributive activities of these associations. They will also strengthen your relationship with them. By accomplishing these two things, you and your library or museum can more effectively center community and resident-led change.

(See "Learning Conversation With Residents" for additional tips.)

See the "[Asset Mapping Tool #3: Associations](#)" for more on associations and how to connect with them.

## Learning Conversation with an Association Leader (Example)

**Introduce** yourself, your group and your purpose.

*Example:* We are the parents association of PS 112, seeking to involve local associations in improving literacy in our community.

**Learn about...**

- The association—Name, address, telephone, contact person
- Their meetings—Time, date, place, open or by invitation
- Their leaders—Who are they? What do they each do?
- Their primary purpose—What does their association do? Why do they do it?
- What else do they do?
- What might they do in the future? Why might they do it?
- Interest in our purpose?

*Many people read poorly in our community. Local associations are working together to raise literacy here. Do you think your association or some of your members might be interested in working on this issue with us?*

- If interested, what are next steps?
  - How to involve your membership?
  - How do we find out what your association might want to do?
- What other local associations are you connected to?
- Do you think any others might be interested in our purpose?
  - Who do you know personally?
  - Would you introduce us?
- Who else should we get to know?





*“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”*

Lilla Watson

*Indigenous Australian visual artist,  
academic, and activist*



## REFERENCES

Russell, C. (2015). [Nurture Development Refined Guidesheets](#). (p. 12)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### The Community Catalyst Asset-Mapping Toolkit:

INTRO: [Asset Mapping Overview & User Guide](#)

TOOLS:   
1: [Individual Gifts & Skills](#)  
2: [Resident-Led Associations](#)  
3: [Institutional Assets](#)  
4: [Agency-Led Asset Mapping](#) (*this document*)

CCI Stories of Practice: [Woodland Zoo / Seattle Youth Climate Action Network](#)  
[Emory Rose Archives Library](#)  
[Free Library of Philadelphia Catalyst Toolkit](#)

### More Asset Mapping Processes:

[“Asset-Based Community Mapping Walk”](#) (in “Guidesheets,” p. 13) (Nurture Development)

[Asset Mapping: Eight Steps to Increase and Support Residential Engagement](#) (Duncan)

[“Asset Mapping Atlas”](#) (in Participatory Community-Building Handbook, p. 17) (Jeder)

### More on Working with Communities as an Institution:

[Tips for Working with Neighborhoods](#) (Duncan)

[Reflections on the Catalytic Role of an Outsider](#) (Bergdall)

[SHIFT Participant-Centered Rubric](#) (Denver Foundation)

[Strategies for Institutions as Servants](#) (Green)

[Rekindling Democracy: A Professional’s Guide to Working in Citizen Space](#) (Russell)

### More on Asset-Based Community Development:

[A Basic Guide to Asset Based Community Development](#) (McKnight)

[People-Powered: 12 Domains that People are Uniquely Able to Change](#) (Russell)

[www.abcdinstitute.org](http://www.abcdinstitute.org) (Asset-Based Community Development Institute)



**TO LEARN MORE** about the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, visit [www.imls.gov/cci](http://www.imls.gov/cci)

Prepared by the ABCD Evaluation Team for the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, composed of faculty from the Asset Based Community Development Institute. Lead Author: April Doner