



Creating Asset Inventories for Service and Engagement

Overview: Creating an asset map – a visual representation of the skills, talents, and resources present in a community – is an effective tool for exploring and understanding a community. Once undertaken, an effective asset map is constantly evolving and makes community resources easy-to-use, which then makes them more valuable for planning and collaborative efforts. Participants in this training will create a useful asset map for a real (or, in some training situations, simulated) community. In the process, they will learn the ROUR (Recognize, Organize, Utilize, Reciprocate) approach to creating asset-based program strategies. The final portion of the training will challenge the participants to address a real (or fictional) community issue, using their map and inventories as resources.

Category: Community context and engagement; asset-mapping; impact

Level: Beginner to intermediate

Type: This is a structured, discussion-based activity designed for a workshop setting. Components of this activity may be easily adapted for use during regular meetings.

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- To recognize the benefits of asset-based approaches in a variety of service efforts.
- To learn and use the ROUR strategy as a tool for asset-based approaches.
- To create a visual asset map.
- To use the visual asset map as a tool for coordinating service in an asset-based way.

Materials:

- Raggedy Ann doll (or equivalent)
- Ball of yarn
- Flip Chart/Chalkboard/Marker Board displaying the ROUR strategy
- Flip Chart/Chalkboard/Marker Board displaying an example asset diagram
- Paper & pencils/pens for everyone in the group
- Community Search Scavenger Hunt handout

How to Prepare:

Review the trainer guide and become comfortable with all information and activities. In preparation for the asset-mapping portion of this activity, the trainer should collect general information about the community in order to provide preliminary direction for the participants (e.g. list of area schools, religious houses, organizations, government institutions, businesses, etc.). The trainer should also prepare a flip chart of the ROUR strategy and tape it to the wall for all to see.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

Total suggested time for this session is 1 hour, 10 minutes, not including the allotted time for Asset Mapping (Modify as needed).

1)	Web of Life	10 minutes
2)	ROAR /Assets Introduction	30 minutes
3)	Asset Mapping Activity	variable
4)	Mapping It Out	20 minutes
5)	Reflection activity	10 minutes

1 Web of Life

Suggested time 10 minutes

The activity begins with an icebreaker that demonstrates the philosophical importance of interconnectedness and collaboration.

The Setup:

Have the students stand in a large circle, shoulder to shoulder.

Explain to the students that a healthy individual life relies on the health of our communities. We live in a variety of separate and combined communities: on- or off-campus, academic, extra-curricular, religious and spiritual, athletic, political, culinary, etc. All communities share certain qualities. All individuals have a stake in making sure these qualities remain strong.

Have participants quickly answer the question, “What makes a community healthy?”

Read the following quote aloud:

“You must teach your children...that all things are connected like the blood that unites one family. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons of Earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.” (Chief Seattle)

Ask for the group’s cooperation in respecting their peers with a listening ear.

Web of Life:

Hand the ball of yarn to one person. Have them hold the ball in one hand, and the end of the yarn in the other. This person should share their name, their connection to one person in the

circle, and one or two reasons for that feeling of connection. Then, holding on tightly to the end of yarn, the speaker should toss the ball to that person. The person who receives the ball should do the same, holding the strand tight and tossing the ball to the person with whom he or she feels connected. The process should continue until everyone in the circle has been tossed the ball and is holding onto a piece of yarn. (NOTE: People may receive the yarn more than once.) A web should form in the middle of the circle.

You might illustrate the importance of mutual relationships by tossing a Raggedy Ann doll (or similar toy) onto the center of the web. Tell everyone to notice how the community supports the doll as it is falling. Call on several individuals—about one third of the group—to let go of their yarn, and have everyone else step back until the slack has been taken in. Toss the doll again, and note how it falls through the web. (*Variation:* Different effects can be reached by specifying which third of the group should let go of the yarn – e.g.: “Those people who feel they have the least to say about others in the group,” or “those people who spoke more than twice....”)

Ask the group to invite those who had let go of the yarn to rejoin the circle. Ask everyone to stand shoulder to shoulder.

Reflection:

Ask the group to take a moment to reflect upon what their fellow members in the circle community said about the other people in the circle.

Ask the group to share some thoughts on the importance of community.

Ask the group to note how it is not the open air between the strands of yarn that supports the doll, but the connections themselves.

Ask them to contemplate the following question: When involved in service, which do they focus on—the strands of community? Or the air between the strands and the fact that sometimes the doll falls through?

This is an important transitional question between the Web of Life activity and a discussion of approaching community building and project planning from an asset-based approach. The facilitator may ask the group to sit down, place the yarn on the ground in front of them and let go, so that the web remains during the discussion. Regardless of the means, it is important to make sure the transition into the discussion is seamless.

2 ROUR/Assets Introduction

Suggested time 30 minutes

The next step teaches the ROUR strategy for building or honing collaborations. During the following discussion, pass out a sheet of paper and a pencil to everyone in the group.

Ask: Why it might be important to focus on the individual strands of Community within the Web of Life, rather than the space between the strands.

Ask: What are some ways that service programs focus more on the space than on the Web? Bring up deficiencies in census surveys and statistics such as illiteracy and school dropout rates, etc.

Ask: What are some reasons that people over estimate negative perceptions.

- Bad News = Bigger News
- People understand/fear what they don't know

Ask: Why it might be important that people know the problems of their community?

Ask: What the dangers are of only focusing on the problems?

Often, people think that you just have to state problems in order to adequately address them. In reality, though, recognition of a problem is only the first step of the long process of improvement. You might get clues about how to solve a problem by studying it, but you'll never actually solve it if you only focus on the problem.

Imagine: What would it be like if everyone was as familiar with the solution to a problem as they are with a problem?

Explain that the purpose of this activity is to approach problems from a Community Web perspective, using an “**Asset-Based**” strategy, rather than a “**Deficiency-Laden**” strategy. Many resources have been developed that approach community change based on deficiencies. This workshop employs a methodology that combats the inherent pessimism of that approach. Rather than focusing on deficiencies, this approach focuses on assets and how to rearrange them in order to bring about change.

The facilitator should lead the group in a discussion of the four tenants of this strategy, in order to better understand the rationale behind it.

ROUR

Recognize

Recognize both the deficiencies and the assets. The deficiencies will provide fodder for a tenable goal. The assets will provide vision, a plan, energy to accomplish, empowerment and results.

Organize

Assets are community property. In order to best utilize assets and achieve goals, the community has to be willing to contribute their assets. The best way to ensure this is through organization. Successful activities are organized in a way that makes everyone feel **Interested, Included and Invaluable**.

The **BIG THREE** to remember:

- 1) Appeal to peoples' interests
- 2) Make sure everyone understands and agrees on the big picture
- 3) Make sure everyone has a role to play and knows each others' roles

Utilize

Note that this step is not called “Implementation.” Ask the group why they think that is so. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition:

- Implement—v. “To put into effect”
- Utilize—v. “To put to use”

Why might the terminology be important here?

Ask the group if anyone would like to share an example of a program that does not quite fit the needs of the people with whom it was designed to work. For example:

Students from X University visit a local retirement community once a week. They play games, sing, and paint with the residents there, often displacing more able-bodied residents who wish to lead the same activities. However, there are never enough volunteers in the next room over, the cafeteria, so less able-bodied residents are often forced to wait 30 minutes to an hour for their scheduled meals. If the university students recognized that there are talented leaders within the retirement community, they could give up that part of their work and could focus on meeting the real need – cafeteria assistants.

Through discussion, flush out the idea that strong communities focus on putting their assets to use. A community’s assets are the basis for effective programs and plans—*you utilize assets in order to implement plans*. The term “Utilize” is one of empowerment: use what you have for positive gain. As long as you focus on utilizing assets, you will not lose sight of the true Web of Community.

Reciprocate

Discuss with the group: Are you part of the community where you serve? How well do you understand it? How well do you contribute to its welfare—emphasize quality of work, not quantity of volunteers or of hours.

Reciprocation, a mutual give-and-take, means building ties **with and among the community**.

The ROUR strategy is community-based approach. The stronger your ties with the community, the better your program will be. It has two major components: recognizing assets, and being an asset.

Ask the group for examples:

- What can you do to recognize your community partners for their contributions?
- What can you do to make sure your community partners are assets to one another, and not just to your program?

Among the results of a successfully implemented ROUR strategy are community empowerment, grass roots optimism and enthusiasm, and positive results.

Explain that the basis for the ROUR strategy is **assets**. Success depends on your ability to recognize and harness the assets. Participants will now have take part in an “asset mapping” exercise that will help them find and organize a variety of assets.

3 Creating an Asset Map

Suggested time variable

Section 3 leads the group through the asset mapping activity and provides for discussion of the usefulness of the asset map within the ROUR strategy.

NOTE: Depending on the time, location, and participant group, the facilitator may choose one of several different exercises for this portion of the training. The exercise should challenge the participants to seek out information, creatively figure out how they might be useful to different ends, and organize them on paper for all to see. Below is one activity. The facilitator may choose to modify the activity appropriately or create his/her own.

Activity – Community Search Scavenger Hunt

Suggested time 4 hours (can be modified to be longer or shorter, or over the course of several days, depending on the group's needs)

You may give them several days to complete the scavenger hunt, if you want answers to be more in-depth, and have them report back and finish the activity at a preset time.

The purpose of this activity is for participants to realize how many “assets” already exist in their community. In the context of this activity, “asset” should be defined as “A useful or valuable quality, person, thing, advantage, or resource.” Participants will explore their community by consider what valuable qualities, persons, things, advantages, or resources already exist and can be used to move the community forward.

Split the participants into groups of three, and pass out the Community Search Scavenger Hunt worksheet (at end of this document) to each member of the group. Each group will be in a competition to see how much information they can find about a given community. Emphasize that all members of the group should stay together at all times. They should write that information down on their Scavenger Hunt sheets. At the end of the time limit, a representative of the group will present their findings to all the participants.

Guidelines:

- You must have fun,
- You must be an respectable ambassador for student service programs, and
- You must return within the time limit.

Suggest that, as the groups talk with people about the community, they should introduce themselves as college students who are working on an asset map project in order to learn more about their community. Do not pressure people who are not interested in talking with you.

(VARIATIONS: Specify that the group must relate every found asset to a certain type of program. Limit the participants to public transportation and walking. Require a certain number of phone contacts and in-person interviews.)

Take notes on a flip chart during the presentations, so that everyone can see the assets that the different groups found. Display them prominently for the remainder of the training.

Ask questions that probe aspects of ROUR. Examples:

- What are three assets you found among different members of the community, whether or not they know it? What could you do to connect them more effectively?
 - What are three assets that could relate to a program you are working on?
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4 Mapping It Out

Suggested time 20 minutes

Give each group a sheet of flip chart paper.

Tell participants that each group will be given a topic – a special program that they hope to build in the community. If the groups did the Community Search Scavenger Hunt, the facilitator may choose to use topics based on projects the groups said they would like to start.

Instruct them that they will have 10 minutes to create a visual diagram of their assets, using their topics as an organizational basis. It may be helpful to display a sample diagram as a visual aid (you can find a sample diagram on which to base your drawing at the end of this facilitator's guide). For example, if the group was charged with addressing a neighborhood trash problem, which people or organizations would you talk with first about creating a long-term solution? The groups may use Venn diagrams, bubble-type spider diagrams, or any other style they choose. They should be prepared to explain their choices of organizations.

Spend the remaining ten minutes sharing each group's diagram with the rest of the participants.

5 Reflection Activity

Suggested time 10 minutes

Ask the group to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, as they were at the beginning of the exercise. It is important that everyone's shoulders are touching.

Show the Raggedy Ann doll (or equivalent) to everyone in the circle. Explain that the person holding the doll is the only one allowed to speak. That person will have a chance to share three things about the experience and what they learned: something negative, something positive, and a hope/ goal. After each person talks, s/he should pass the doll to the next person. Continue until everyone has had a turn. Make sure that the participants emphasize how they are going to use the information they have learned.

Community Search Scavenger Hunt

FIND the Following:

EXISTING EFFORTS:

Two local tutoring programs and their contact information:

Name _____ Phone: _____

Name _____ Phone: _____

Three other ongoing service projects:

Three short-term service projects:

Three projects currently in the planning stages:

Three areas in which you would start a project—if you lived in this community—and a preliminary contact for each:

PEOPLE:

Learn at least two of the following from each of the following people's perspectives:

- Two personal talents
- Two learned skills
- Two hopes or aspirations
- Two things everyone should know about the community

A religious leader

A librarian

A small business owner

A small business employee

A big business manager

A big business employee

A non-profit organization employee

A high school student

An elementary school student

A college student (other than self, if applicable)

A parent

A taxi driver

Someone who is over 70 years old

A war veteran

A volunteer coordinator

A teacher

A public transportation driver (if permissible)

A construction worker

A waiter/waitress

A reporter

A lawyer

A bartender

An auto mechanic

At least one person who doesn't fit into any of these categories

Sample Diagram

Community Mapping Tool

