



Asset Mapping: Why to ask Why

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Asset mapping is a promising tool for mobilizing and sustaining positive changes related to community health and well-being. In contrast to approaches that focus on communities' needs or deficits, asset mapping harnesses community resources in order to foster transformation and growth. We highlight the results of two asset mapping workshops and



Figure 1 Photograph provided by the author

“Community members differ in what they value within existing community structures and what their priorities are in determining the direction of future efforts”

show how they demonstrate the underlying values

expressed by participants.

A primary tenant of asset mapping is that when we know what the assets are, they can be connected to develop the community. Understanding why community members name certain organizations “exemplary” is a necessary step in this process. It allows community members and leaders to connect these assets in ways that are rooted in community values and the realities of existing community and social structures.

We analyze asset mapping workshops which focused on access to food and safe places to be active. These were conducted in 2012 and 2013 in two North Carolina (USA) study communities; one rural and one urban.

Highlights

When someone says “This is important” We need to always remember to ask “WHY do you think it is important?”

Deep listening is necessary.

These asset mapping workshops began community-based participatory outreach work as part of a larger research and extension grant studying the community assets that impact access to healthy food and places to be active. Researchers used the asset mapping process as both a learning approach and as a springboard for community action. This curriculum and workshop design are unique. Not only do we ask community members to identify and map the assets in their community, we also ask community members and agency representatives to describe why they named these resources and capabilities as assets. The study then compared the values behind each group's responses and how understanding these values may help spur more sustainable community action.

Methods

We brought community members and agency representatives together to talk about assets in their community that facilitate healthy eating and physical activity. We then asked why they considered the things they named to be assets. This study analyzes the responses among different groups and the implications of the values behind those responses for community development.

Results

- Groups may list similar things as community assets, but have very different reasons for valuing the things they list.
- Power structures may create inaccurate assumptions as to why things are seen as important.
- Understanding why different groups name things as assets allows community development practitioners to better comprehend what the community really sees as the way to create change and strengthen community assets.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

This was a cross disciplinary team of authors; a Community Psychologist, a sociologist and two religious studies faculty that primarily work in health promotion. As a Community Psychologist, I value the perspectives these fields brought to the project, in how they think about change, motivation, individual and community cultures, and ways of understanding. Community Psychologists are very interested in how power influences people's experience of realizing self-determination and how the worldview and assumptions of "helpers" may be problematic. This article tried to dig down under value assumptions to understand how the community may most want to move forward.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: Certain intrinsic meanings and motivations may be assumed and not further understood. Discrepancies in values may explain differences in findings between groups. This is an important step when doing asset mapping.

Practice: Partnership with the community is much more powerful when there is an understanding of underlying values driving the work. While on the surface, people in power may see their work as meeting community goals, those with less power may understand significant differences in how organizations work and the degree to which they meet community needs.

Social Action: When developing strategies to create change, partnership with the local community that creates a grassroots ownership of change efforts is needed. This article gives a clear articulation of the mechanisms of one potential reason WHY this practice is essential and points to a place where power holders may still make inaccurate value assumptions when working to improve community assets.

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