

## **Lesson 9: Assessment**

### **Goals/Purpose**

This lesson provides the group with hands-on experience planning and conducting their own community assessment. Youth are guided through a step-by-step process, which will help them identify the assets and problems in their community. Ultimately, the group will use this information to define their main community organizing project.

### **Objectives**

- Introduce young people to different ways to assess their community
- Plan and implement a community assessment that identifies the strengths and problems of a community

### **Total Time**

90 minutes over 2 meetings plus a separate small group planning meeting and the 3-hour community mapping event

### **Agenda/Activities**

- Introductions/Icebreaker
- Community Mapping: Round Robin Brainstorm
- Getting Ready
- Planning the Walk Around
- Community Mapping Event
- Closing

### **Facilitator Preparation**

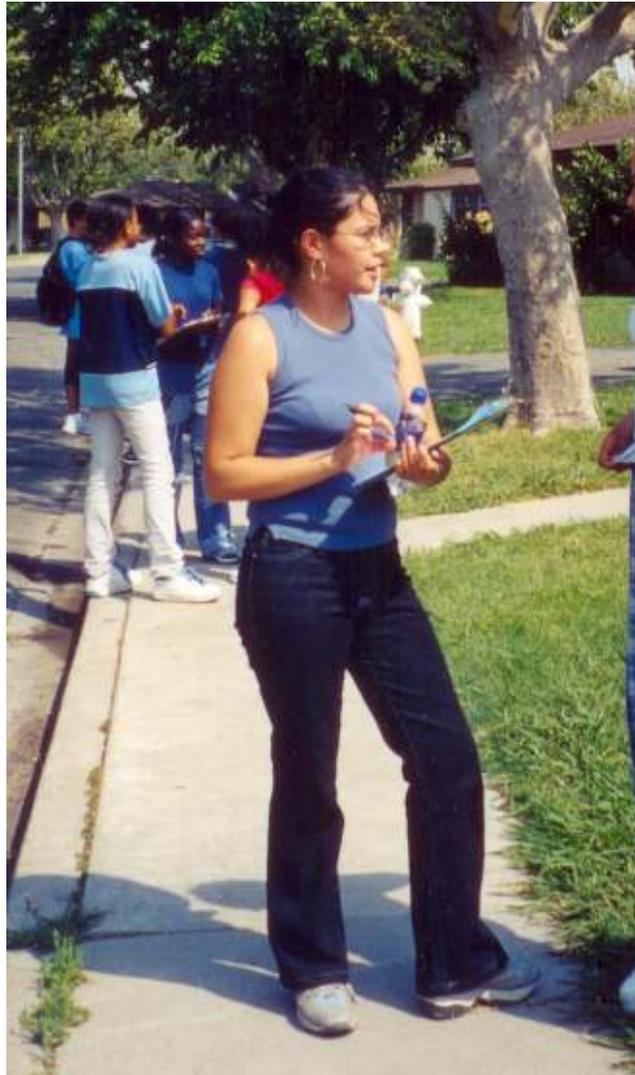
- Make posters for mapping brainstorm (institutions, organizations, media, parks..)
- Map out travel route and follow (if time allows, do with a small group of youth)
- Divide group into mapping teams
- Identify extra adults as support for community mapping event
- Get parent/guardian permission for community mapping event

### **Materials Needed**

- Newsprint
- Markers
- Observation logs (1 copy per person)
- Community questionnaire (10-15 copies per group)
- Clip boards with pens/pencils
- Disposable cameras with flash
- Map with travel route highlighted
- Water and/or snack

### **Tools**

- Sample community questionnaire
- Community Mapping Observation Checklist
- Sample community maps



## The Basics

Assessment is the process of learning about a community in an organized way. There are different ways of learning about a community that are creative and youth friendly –e.g. take pictures, walk around, surveys, and interviews. This process will help ensure that the problem is something your group members really care about and are willing to spend time working on. Finally, assessment is a chance for the youth to have fun doing some ‘detective work’ in their own community and to build shared experiences.

Through an assessment, you want to find out and document both community problems and assets (resources). This will help your group decide the main thing to work on. Community organizing often focuses on the problems in a community – since that is what we want to fix. However, for participants to experience their own power, which will lead to their success, they must also identify the strengths and resources that exist in their community as well as in the people who live there. Furthermore, it is important to know the community resources so you have an idea of who can help your group fix the problem.

How you define ‘community’ will impact your assessment. For example, your group may want to focus on their neighborhood or school, or they may define community as a group of people who share a particular interest (such as music), or a characteristic (like being young women). In any case, talking to other community members is essential. Doing so will help your group (1) determine if others share your concerns (2) gauge the community interest and (3) let you know who might be motivated to get involved in your future efforts. Finally, being able to show that your interests represent those of the broader community builds your power when working with community leaders and elected officials.

### **Tips for a successful assessment:**

- **Planning ahead is key!** Allow plenty of time, map out your travel route, and make sure you have adequate adult support. A drink or snack is always welcome when walking around.
- **Be a guide.** The adult leader(s) may need to help the youth examine their community in a different way and draw out their every day experiences that can be used in organizing. Use the youth’s experiences to drive the process, but include other views as well.
- **Practice interview skills.** Providing opportunities for youth to practice talking to people from the community allows them the chance to assess their readiness for the real thing.
- **Be prepared to address stereotypes.** Youth may have experienced many stereotypes about where they live, different racial groups, speaking a language other than English, and may also need support to challenge their own prejudices.

## 1. Community Mapping: Round Robin Brainstorm 30 minutes

Materials: newspapers with asset categories, newspaper labeled PROBLEMS, markers

- a. The round robin brainstorm is completed in 3 steps. First, list the community assets. Next, discuss how the assets can be resources and identify existing relationships between group members and assets. Last, list community problems. The chart below provides the facilitator with information to guide the process. However, the activity works best with each asset listed on a separate piece of newspaper so participants can rotate to each one.
- b. Before the meeting, post the community mapping questions around the room (Assets column below). Have a separate, blank newspaper labeled PROBLEMS at the top to use when processing the brainstorm.
- c. Introduce the idea of community mapping. Let youth know that community mapping is fun! Explain that it's like detective work – you walk around, talk to people, ask questions, collect information & write down what you see in detail. The objective is to learn about our community by collecting and recording (map) information. This will help us pick a project to work on by helping us find out about **resources/strengths** as well as **problems**.



<b>Facilitator Guide to Community Mapping Brainstorm</b>		
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2a</b>	<b>Step 2b</b>
<b>Assets What are the ...</b>	<b>How each can be a potential resource?</b>	<b>Who do we know there?</b>
Institutions? (schools, hospitals, community colleges, libraries, or health centers...)	Institutions have information, networking, services, meeting space	
Government (chamber of commerce, social services, health department, hospital, police, board of supervisors, mayor, fire department)	Government organizations have authority, information, networking, services	
Community Based Organizations, also known as CBOs (Boys and Girls clubs, religious organizations, neighborhood or citizen associations, cultural groups)	CBOs have services, meeting space, authority, sponsorship, networking, experts, information	
Businesses (large and small)	Small businesses want the community to thrive because that also helps their business (their self interest) plus they are more likely to be locally owned and so they may also share larger community interests. Large businesses may have grants or other funds or experts.	
Media (Newspapers, billboards, local cable TV, movie theatres)	Media can help get the word out about projects, events, problems	
Parks, vacant lots and unused building space	Parks and vacant lots can be gathering places for events (may also be source of problems or projects)	
Individual talents or gifts of community leaders:	E.g., cultural diversity, energetic youth, strong family ties, close to neighbors, strong neighborhood identities	

### **Step 1: List Assets.**

- d. Tell the group that first we are going to focus on assets. Explain that an asset is a strength or a resource. Remind participants that earlier with the fish activity, we learned what our individual and group strengths are. Tell them that now we are going to focus on strengths of the **community**.
- e. Explain that we're going to do a brainstorm about the different resources in this community/school. Give some examples. Remind participants that they all are the experts about their community, and today we're going to see how much they know. Explain that we will use this information to decide where to go on our community mapping event. Also, when we pick our project it is important to know what our resources are.
- f. Divide the participants into small groups of 3-4. Have groups rotate to each poster and spend 2 minutes at each listing the assets in their community for each category.

### **Step 2: Discuss how assets can be resources and if group members know anyone at the community or government organizations**

- g. As a large group, review each asset category. Ask for a volunteer to read each piece of newsprint.
- h. After each, remind youth that each of the assets can be a resource to help our group because of what they have to offer like services, information or space or because of the people who work there. Brainstorm how each can be a potential resource. (Use information on the chart above as a guide.)
- i. As you go along, ask:
  - **Who has been to any of the places?** What do you know about them? (This will help you decide where to go on your community mapping event)
  - **Does anyone have any connections to community or government officials?** Record the name of anyone in the group who belongs to any of the organizations or knows someone who does (friend or family member) on that poster.

Take a minute to reflect on the resources in the community. Emphasize to the group how their power plus the power of the group combined with community strengths will lead to positive change for them and the community! (Like the fish poster we made!)

### **Step 3: List Community Problems**

j. Explain that now we are going to spend a few minutes focusing on some problems in the community. **Ask, what are the problems in your neighborhood? What do other people say about this community? Is it true?** (If youth can not think of any responses, ask them if any of the following exist in the community and if so, to what degree? Drug dealing? Unsafe motorists? Gangs? Other violence? Graffiti? Homelessness? Not enough activities for youth? Inadequate jobs? Police harrassment?) Record the brainstorm on the PROBLEMS newsprint you reserved at the beginning of the meeting).

k. Then ask **what kind of facilities are there at the parks?** Do people feel safe there? If not, why don't they feel safe? Where do they feel safe? (Add any problems to the problem brainstorm from above.)

### **Conclusion:**

l. Tell participants they obviously know their community very well! We will use this to decide where to go in our community mapping event and see some of the community for ourselves.

m. If the event will take place outside your regular meeting time, discuss possible dates and times when most people can attend.

n. Ask for 4-5 volunteers to help plan the details of the community mapping event.

o. If time allows, ask for a volunteer to type up your brainstorm lists for future reference. If you have some computer savvy folks in your group, ask them to work with you to make an impressive community map (see Tools). Keep in mind that given the timeframe involved and skills of group members, the adult leader may need to assume responsibility for typing up the brainstorm lists.

## 2. Next Steps:

### Planning the Community Mapping Event

45 minutes

Materials: newsprint, markers, lists from community mapping brainstorm, large copy of a map of the community, copies of street map of the community for each youth leader

This works best done with a small group at a separate meeting time.

a. Use the information from your community mapping brainstorm to prioritize where to go and who to talk to. Considering how much time you have as well as what knowledge and experience group members already have, make a list of places to visit.

Try to include a mix of people and places such as neighborhoods, parks, storeowners, service providers, religious organizations, and residents (both young and older).

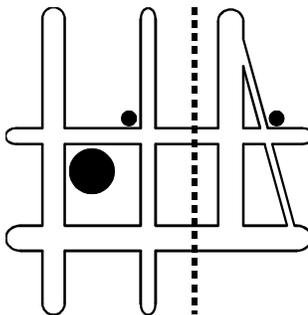
b. Divide the group into teams of 6-10 youth per adult. You could break your group into teams and choose different topics or even different neighborhoods to cover. Ask each member of the planning group to help lead a different team.

c. Give each youth leader a copy of the street map to outline the travel route for their group.

d. Before the event the adult leader needs to arrange for:

- Written parent/guardian permission
- Transportation (optional, depending on the size of the area you will cover.)  
If you are covering a large area on foot, you may want to have an extra adult available in a car to help as needed.
- Additional adults to come with the group (check with your organization about appropriate adult-youth ratios).
- During the event, it helps for each group to have a cell phone with them and a list of the contact information for the group leaders.

Sample  
Neighborhood  
Map



### 3. Getting Ready

Materials: blank permission forms, poster describing roles for walk-around, copies of community questionnaire, newsprint

This is best done the week prior to the community mapping event to prepare the youth for what to do and expect.

a. Remind youth that we are going to be doing a community mapping event where we go around the community and see for ourselves what the problems and assets are! So, now we are going to discuss the logistics of the event so everyone will know what is going to happen and how we will each participate.

b. Facilitate a large group discussion to include the following topics:

- **Explain what to look for.** Everyone's job at each site is to look around and take notice of exactly what you see. You will have an observation log that has specific suggestions of what to look for. Let the recorder for that topic know of any important things you notice. **You will review the observation log and roles in your teams.**
- **Review Roles.** Each team will have a youth leader and adult leader to guide the group and read the travel route. Team members will have the following roles:

**Spokesperson (2-3):** Introduce yourself and the group to community members and service providers. Also, explain what your group is about, ask them the questions on the community questionnaire, and write down their responses.

**Recorders:** Everyone should take a turn writing down the important details for 1-2 topic areas they are most interested in. Ask for a volunteer to record responses from the community questionnaire onto large newsprint after the walk around.

**Photographer:** Take lots of pictures of what you see – both good things and problems.

- **Explain the supplies the youth will have.** Disposable cameras, clipboard and pens, observation log, map of area with travel route, water.
- **Talking with community members.** Go over the interview questionnaire (see Tools for sample). Ask if there are any questions. Advise the group that if they want to take a picture of someone or their property, to ask permission first and respect their right to say, "No." Remind youth that

they represent the group and we want to promote a positive image of youth (plus we may want to work together in the future).

- **Review safety guidelines.** Everyone needs to stay with the group at all times. Review any consequences for misbehavior.

c. Practice Skill Building.

- Ask for a volunteer to role play with you a mock interview with a community member for the whole group. After, go over what each person did well and places to improve.
- Divide the group into pairs to practice interviewing each other as if they were on the community mapping event. Give each person a copy of the questionnaire that will be used during the event. Suggest that participants role play interviewing different community members (e.g. another youth, a senior citizen, a storeowner, a police officer...). Each person should practice being both the interviewer and interviewee.
- Afterward, debrief using the questions below:
  1. What was it like? Was it hard to start out?
  2. What roles did people play? How did this change how the interview went?
  3. What challenges came up? How did you handle them? (Be sure to talk about difficult or uninterested people. Tell the youth that their role is to thank the person and walk away rather than engage in conflict.)
  4. Is there any other feedback?



## 4. Community Mapping Event

2.5 - 3 hours

Materials: signed permission forms, disposable cameras, clipboards, pens/pencils, copies of questionnaire, copies of observation log, map of area with travel route, water, snack (optional), and transportation (optional, depending on size of group)

- a. Let the group know that today is the day of our community mapping event – we are going to have fun visiting different parts of the community, talking to people and recording what we see.
- b. As a large group, review:
  - How to keep yourself safe.
  - How to talk with community members.
- c. In your teams:
  - Go over your travel route. The adult or youth team captain will be responsible for the map.
  - Decide the following roles:

**Spokesperson (2-3):** Introduce yourself and the group to community members and service providers. Explain to them what your group is about and get their ideas about what can and should be done to improve the community.

**Recorders:** Everyone should take a turn writing down the important details for 1-2 topic areas they are most interested in.

**Photographer:** Take lots of pictures of what you see – both good things and problems.

**Fun camera:** Take pictures of your group having fun together.



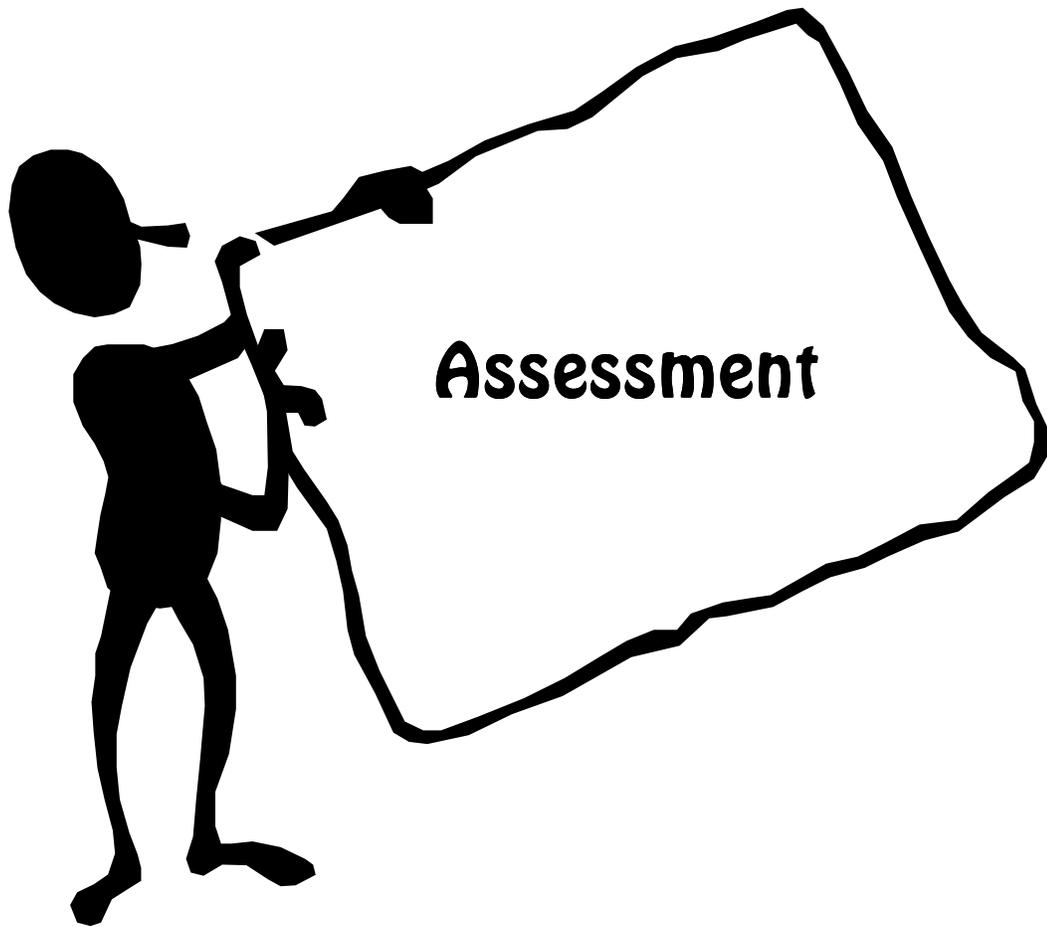
- d. You are ready to GO! Have fun with your detective work! Have a designated time and place for all of the teams to meet up at the end of your event.
- e. At the end of your event, collect any supplies and answer any questions.

Remind participants that we will have more of a chance to talk about our experiences at the next meeting. Use the following questions to check in:

- Who did you talk to? How did it go? What did they have to say?
- What did you see? Was there anything that surprised people?
- What new information did you find out about your community?
- In what areas did you feel safest? Least safe?



# Tools – Lesson 9



# Community Mapping Brainstorm Questions

What are the...	How each can be a potential asset (resource)?	Contacts/Connections
Institutions (schools, community colleges, hospitals or health centers, libraries...)	Institutions have information, networking, services, meeting space	
Government (chamber of commerce, social services, health department, hospital, police, board of supervisors, mayor, fire department)	Government organizations have authority, information, networking, services.	
Community Based Organizations (Boys and Girls clubs, YMCA/YWCA, religious organizations, neighborhood or citizen associations, cultural groups)	CBOs have services, meeting space, authority, sponsorship, networking, experts, information	
Businesses (large and small)	Businesses. Small businesses want the community to thrive because that also helps their business (appeals to their self interest) plus they are more likely to be locally owned and for so they may also share larger community interests. Large businesses may have grants or other funds or experts	
Media (Newspapers, billboards, local cable TV, movie theatres)	Media can help get the word out about projects, events, problems	
Parks, vacant lots and unused building space	Parks and vacant lots can be gathering places for events (may also be source of problems or projects)	
Public Transportation		
Individual talents or gifts of community leaders: cultural diversity, energetic youth, strong family ties, close to neighbors, strong neighborhood identities		

# SAMPLE

## Community Mapping Questionnaire

**Instructions for Participants:** During the community mapping event, some of you will be asking other people for their opinions about the community. Use this as a guide.

### Introduction:

*Hi, we are teens from a youth group here in \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of community). We are not selling anything. But we are trying to better understand the needs of \_\_\_\_\_. If you have about 5 minutes, we'd like to ask you a few questions to get your ideas.*

1. What do you think are the three (3) best things about this community?
2. What do you think are the three (3) greatest problems or needs of this community?
3. We are deciding a project for our youth group. Can you think of one or two **specific things** that we – and other teens -- could do to make our community better?
4. Do you know of other people or groups working on the same things? Who? What do you know about what they've done so far? Do you know how we could contact them?

**Closing:** *Those are some great ideas! Thanks so much for your time. We will share your opinions with the rest of our group. If you have any other questions, you can call our group leader – we have a card with the phone # if you'd like one. (Give out cards to those interested.)*

## Sample Community Mapping Observation Log

Observer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Asset	Describe (what is there)	Location	Contact Info	Comments
<b>Grocery Stores</b> What kinds of food stores are there? Small? Big? Farmer's market? Produce stands?				
<b>Fast Food</b> What kinds of fast food? What kinds of other restaurants?				
<b>Recreation facilities</b> Are there recreation centers? sports clubs?				
<b>Public Parks</b> Are there public parks? What kinds of facilities are there? What can you do there? Do you feel safe there?				
<b>What kind of billboards are there?</b> Are they positive, negative or neutral?				
<b>Health Care facilities</b> What kinds? Health center? Hospital?				
<b>Social Services</b> What kinds of social services are there?				
<b>Churches</b> What kinds of churches are there? Are they active?				

## Sample Community Mapping Observation Log

Observer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Asset	Describe (what is there)	Location	Contact Info	Comments
<b>Transportation</b> cars, buses, BART? Do they run on time? on schedule? Often enough?				
<b>Streetlights</b> Are there enough?				
<b>Stop Signs, traffic lights and speed bumps</b> Are there enough?				
<b>Jobs</b> What kinds of jobs are there? For adults? For youth?				
<b>How visible are the police/law enforcement?</b> Is their presence positive or negative?				
<b>Housing</b> Is there single family houses? apartments,? Duplexes? What kind of shape is it?				
<b>Shopping</b> What kinds of stores are there? Where?				