

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES



A GUIDE
TO COMMUNITY
ASSET MAPPING



FALLS
BROOK
CENTRE

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING

There is nothing like an economic crisis - especially one which threatens your livelihood or the continued existence of your community - to focus your thinking on the future and what is important to you and your family.

In any economic crisis, among the hardest hit are regions long dependent on one industry. People whose lives are directly tied to resource industries have been among the first to suffer the consequences of these transformational changes. They often react with anger and disbelief, despair and helplessness. Eventually, they must confront reality.

When mills or other conventional operations shut down, communities are faced with a stark choice: adapt and rebuild or wither away. If your community is facing the loss of its primary industry, or if you see such a threat on the horizon, you may wish to take emergency or preventive action. It is possible for communities to re-invent themselves so that they not only survive, but thrive. They must look at themselves with new eyes, recognize the potential which lies within themselves, and build a resilient economic base which is sustainable in the long term.

The premise of sustainability is that the needs and aspirations of the present can be met without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations. The process of developing sustainability is circular rather than linear; it is a cycle of replenishment rather than depletion.

This manual can launch your community on a process of renewal and resilience. It can help you facilitate the initial step towards successful transition from dependence on a single industry to innovative development based on diverse utilization of community resources. This transition often begins with a small group of determined citizens who engage others in the process of visioning, planning and implementing a sustainable future. The community should cultivate the capacity to shape its own ways of life and work.

As Falls Brook Centre has worked for many years in the field of sustainable resource based communities, we realize the necessity for community preparedness and therefore we encourage the facilitator to focus their attention on community resiliency. Much depends on local leadership and the resources available to them to plan for and implement sustainable development. But

communities also need tools which will make the process coherent and practical. There are many models for strategic planning and experts to advise you. This manual is meant to get you started so that you can move into a comprehensive planning process with a clear understanding of what you have to work with.

GETTING STARTED

The first step in sustainable community revitalization is to look at the dimensions of the current situation and to identify community strengths and weaknesses which will help or hinder its transformation to a more diverse economy.

It is likely that when a crisis strikes, a few citizens will want to react immediately. Some will fight to retain the status quo; this may or may not be feasible. Others will look forward and hope of a different future. Usually, there is a small group which comes together to figure out what action can be taken. Their first step is logically to assess the situation in search of a solution. This can be done through a process called Asset Mapping.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Resiliency is the mechanism through which assets are assembled by a community to overcome economic, social and environmental challenges. Based on participatory conversation, community resiliency is the ongoing ability to work together to identify strengths and challenges, establish common goals, mobilize resources and take collective action. Communities that build resiliency are able to take the steps to survive crisis, influence change and become healthy, vital places, as it is the community itself that cultivates capacity to shape its own ways of life and work.

ANALYZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION

Asset Mapping is a group exercise which enables communities to see themselves from a new perspective and to identify directions for socioeconomic development which may not have been recognized before. It helps you think positively about the place in which you live and work, producing a common view of what is considered important in the community. It also challenges you to recognize how other people see and experience the same community and space. It is the starting point for strategic planning because it identifies what assets the community has and how they might be utilized in the future.

COMMUNITY:

A social group, of any size, in a given locality, who share governance and a common economic and/or cultural history.

WHAT ARE ASSETS?

Assets are the attributes and advantages of a community which are considered essential for the maintenance of its quality of life. Assets are what we want to keep, sustain and build upon for the future. They come in many shapes and forms:

Natural assets are what we have in our natural environment: water, wood, minerals, wildlife, fertile soil, etc.

Built assets are physical structures like buildings and public infrastructure (recreational facilities, water and sewage treatment, etc.)

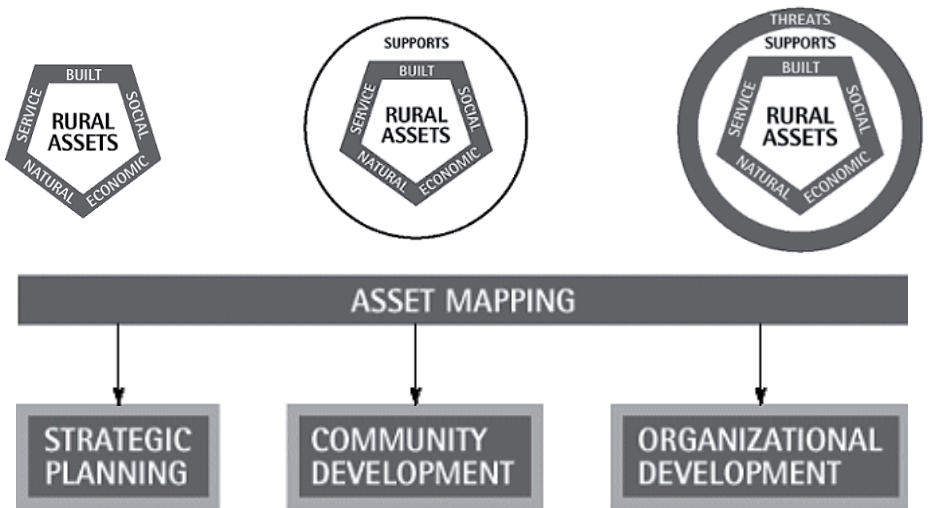
Social assets are the values and culture of the community, including traditions and attitudes of sharing, cooperation, and mutual support.

Economic assets are the jobs and businesses which provide livelihoods.

Public (service) assets include medical and educational services - hospitals, schools, municipal services and others provided by governments.

Intangible assets are usually undiscovered or underutilized skills, expertise and willingness to volunteer and participate in working towards common goals.

The Asset Mapping workshop allows your community to make an inventory of these assets so you know what you have to work with in designing a sustainable future. Mapping community assets means creating a list of good things you already have, ranking the most valued assets, and understanding why these assets are highly valued. An Asset Mapping session will help citizens share an appreciation of what resources exist, what supports them and what threatens them. This is the first step towards a plan of action.



T. Fuller, 2002

It is important throughout the process to allow time for informal conversation and networking. Even though the people attending these sessions may have met, in this process they will learn new things about each other which can lead them to stronger or more productive collaborative actions.

The person who facilitates the asset mapping session and the subsequent steps does not have to be a professional facilitator. The following steps are guidelines that should be adapted for the group size and the community needs. However, he or she must be able to guide the process without directing it. If it

is someone from the community, that person should be one who is generally respected as fair and unbiased. Sometimes the process is more productive if the facilitator comes from another community and has no emotional baggage that could affect their impartiality.

The following are instructions for organizing and facilitating an Asset Mapping session. The outcome of this session should be a list of suggestion and projects to be considered when pursuing strategic planning.

FACILITATING AN ASSET MAPPING SESSION

ADVANCE PLANNING

1. Secure a date and venue, send out invitations. Be sure to include every organization you can think of!
2. Publicize the session in local media and with posters.
3. Take care of logistics ahead of time as much as possible. Three hours should be anticipated for a session. Arrange the room in tables or circles of ten people or less. Assign people to tables by some random selection method like numbers. Each group should nominate a person to write the notes and speak on behalf of the group.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO INCLUDE:

- Local Council
- Youth groups like 4-H
- Women's Institute
- Environmental Groups
- Chamber of Commerce
- Church Groups
- First Nation Organizations
- Tourism
- Service groups like Lions, Rotary etc.

AT THE SESSION

1. Introduce yourself and have all participants introduce themselves. People should be asked to give their names, their organizational affiliations (if any), and one reason why they came to the session. This enables people who may not know each other to make connections if they wish to. Try to keep this brief and discourage people from getting into a discussion at this point.
2. Set the stage. Review the agenda. If there are community members present who played key roles in setting up the session, invite them to speak briefly about their intentions and hopes for the process. Briefly describe what assets are, what Asset Mapping is, why the community has gathered, and what the goal of the session is.
3. At the tables, use the feedback sheet (Appendix 1), have the participants individually write down the assets in their community which are most important to them. It may be helpful to read out the questions so everyone is clear about the task. If there are people who are not comfortable with writing, it may be better to let them say out loud their assets when comes the time to share with the while group.
4. When the individual asset lists are ready, have the participants share their assets with the group, write all the assets on the flip charts marking the recurring ones. Ask for additions or questions, and ask if there are any surprises. Some of the assets on the list may be grouped into categories where they are related to each other. Allow for a little discussion, but keep the process moving.
5. Go around the table and have each person pick his or her top assets, the ones that they most participants want to sustain and build upon. Then underline the three most popular assets as chosen by the group. This helps to assess the group's interests.
6. Go to the second question on the feedback sheet. This identifies the threats or challenges facing the chosen assets. Give the participants time to write down what they consider as threats to those assets and have them share their answers in a round table, writing them on the flip chart. Ask the group to choose the top three threats which affect the top three assets (see if some of them can be linked to others). Allow the participants to express their doubts and concerns, but stay focused on the task. The next step allows them to develop and explore solutions.

7. Go to the third question on the feedback sheet. It asks for ideas about what would be needed to support the priority assets and keep them strong against the identified threats. Again, let them write down their ideas and go around the tables asking for their answers, writing the ideas on the flip chart as they are expressed. More discussion is encouraged in this stage, as it is where the ideas and projects to move forward with may start to form. Have them brainstorm solutions in response to threats.

This is a good point to break for refreshments.

8. Back at the tables; identify projects which would incorporate a number of supports to threats that can be undertaken as a starting point. Once you feel that the group is content with brainstorming of solutions and potential projects, move to the last question on the feedback sheet and repeat the roundtable process. Finish by discussing the organization of the next meeting; identify key players who were missing this time and who should be invited next time. Encourage participants to bring two friends next time.

9. Wrap-up the session by asking each table to report its findings to the whole group. Try to set a date for a follow-up session and determine its goals. Make sure the participants have filled out the contact sheet before they leave. Also, we suggest that you give the participants time to fill in an evaluation form (Appendix 3). (Evaluation is a management tool that allows for measuring the outcomes of the workshop, the progress of the group and identifies areas that need improvement.)

It is important for people to leave with ideas about specific projects related to the community assets in mind. At this stage, projects, not long-term planning will engage people, because they want to see action. Once some projects have been undertaken, the community will begin to feel empowered and will be able to look further into the future. Longer term strategic planning will follow.

WORKSHOP CHECKLIST:

- Feedback Sheets and Evaluation Form for all participants (Appendix 1)
- Participant Contact Sheet (Name, Organization and Contact Information) Very important if a follow-up session is to take place
- Copies of the agenda
- Snacks for Nutritional Break
- Flip Chart Paper and Markers
- Pens and Paper for all Participants
- Copies of Agenda
- Handouts arranged in order
- Masking Tape
- Camera
- Paper Clips
- Name Tags
- Visual Aids (TV, VCR/DVD, projector/screen) and extension cords (if you intend on doing a presentation)

WHAT COMES NEXT?

The follow-up session should focus on choosing and planning one or two projects, allowing for further brainstorming and moving to an action plan which outlines specific tasks. Start by revisiting the recommendations and outcomes from the asset mapping workshop. Once the group has agreed on a project to undertake, you can ask them to fill in the Planning Grid (Appendix 2) to allow project brainstorming to begin.

Now that you know your community's assets and have some plans to develop them through projects, you may want to look at the bigger picture. As a community closely tied to the natural resources, you might want to use an ecological governance model for guidance into and throughout the strategic planning process.

Ecological governance embeds the inclusive perspective of the environment at all levels of decision-making. This approach generates options for resource management through innovation, conservation, resource allocation

and changing patterns of use. It should be a cooperative interaction that the community uses to decide what is in their common interest and how they will act collectively. Beginning with describing and understanding the current situation, which now includes an asset inventory; this governance model or planning framework looks ahead to what the future should be, and works backwards from that vision to the present. Ecological governance uses a technique called backcasting to illustrate the steps which need to be taken to move your community from here to there.

HERE'S HOW YOU DO IT

1. **Identify**, in a participatory manner, all present stakeholders, social systems and ecosystems surrounding the identified subject of interest.
2. **Adopt** a projection for the resources in the region. Apply existing use patterns of stakeholders, social systems and ecosystems to a 10-20 year projection, creating a “business-as-usual” baseline. This tells you where your community will be if the status quo is maintained and nothing changes.
3. **Create** a desired (ideal) future vision of the community for stakeholders, social systems and ecosystems 10 years into the future. Analyze how that future could work for everyone.
4. **Consider** the projected needs of the community/region.
5. **Review** the supply/demand dynamics and options for resources. Identify all current sources of the resource and determine if there are any reserves that are being overused or degraded. Determine alternatives to these assets.
6. **Backcast** and create various paths to follow by designing incremental policies and programs that can get the community from “there” (the desired future projection) to “here” (where we are now). Working backwards determines what needs to be done in order to attain that future.
7. **Walk, talk, write, promote.** Your conclusions must reach the public and particularly key decision makers, if they are to be successfully implemented.

Ecological governance is a method to promote forward momentum. It clarifies the steps required to make the vision a reality. Options and challenges can

be identified. When a group or community takes on a model of ecological governance in their future planning, they could break up the 7 steps into manageable separate sessions focusing on a couple of the actions/steps per gathering – taking time for discussion, breaking to leave time for thought and regrouping to continue working forward.

Now that you have this manual and have read through the process of Asset Mapping and Ecological Governance you have the necessary tools to begin the community strategic planning process. Once you begin the process you will find out which of the suggested methods work best for you and then you can begin to make adaptations to meet the needs of your community and accommodate to the unique future visioning process on which you will embark.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Asset Mapping. A Handbook

http://www.rural.gc.ca/conference/documents/mapping_e.phtml

Canadian Rural Partnership by Tony Fuller, Denyse Guy and Carolyn Pletsch, produced by the Government of Canada.

The Community Tool Box

ctb.ku.edu/tools/en

This is a team from the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.

CIEL - Centre for Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership

www.theciel.com

Helping communities to strengthen leadership and become culturally vibrant, sustainable, business-friendly areas.

The Community Development Technical Assistance Program (CEDTAP)

www.carleton.ca/cedtap

A not-for-profit organization in the field of community economic development (CED), grants community-based organization and community development initiatives.

Service Continuity Planning

<http://bcp.nonprofitrisk.org>

An online course to aid in the development and implementation of a plan to prevent the disruption or termination of services, especially in regards to voluntary sector services.

The Polis Project on Ecological Governance

www.polisproject.org

Centre in Victoria, B.C., where research meets community action. Looking at incorporating an environmental perspective in all aspects of decision making.

Falls Brook Centre

www.fallsbrookcentre.ca

An environmental education and sustainable living demonstration centre in rural New Brunswick. Four main areas of focus Community Development, Organic Agriculture, Forest Stewardship and Appropriate Technology.



We must become the change
we want to see.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

FEEDBACK SHEET

Name: _____

What community do you live in? : _____

What organizations or groups are you part of? :

1. Outline the six most important assets in your community: (we are looking for things such as physical, economic, cultural, related to people and natural assets):

2. Tell us what you think is threatening these assets and the long term prospects for your community:

3. What needs to be done to keep the community strong and healthy and to support those assets?

4. How can we work together? What are the best ways to “connect” communities? And what has worked for them in the past?

PLANNING GRID

Name of the Project:

Project Leader:

Project Goal:

What?

Why?

When?

Where?

Who?

How?

WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

Please take the time to answer the following questions:

1. Overall, how would you rate the methods used to deliver the workshop?

Not at all interesting	Reasonably	Very interesting		
1	2	3	4	5

2. How would you rate the facilitator's knowledge of the subject matter?

Poor	Fair	Excellent		
1	2	3	4	5

3. Did the facilitators present the subject matters effectively?

Not at all	More or less	Very much so		
1	2	3	4	5

4. Has the workshop met your needs?

Not at all	More or less	Very much so		
1	2	3	4	5

Please explain:

5. What did you like best about this workshop?

Additional comments:

THANK YOU!

~ Perhaps the oak tree is brought into creation by two forces at the same time. The acorn from which it all begins is the seed which holds all the promise and potential, which will eventually grow into a tree. Yet there is another force at work, the future tree itself, which wants nothing more than to exist so it pulls the acorn into being, guiding the evolution from nothingness to maturity. It is the oak tree that creates the very acorn from which it was born.

Perhaps when a few people recognize that there is another force operating in community development, much like the oak tree, it is those determined individuals that ensure the future sustainability of the community. ~



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