

Lesson 3

Map Your Community



Objective:

You will identify your community's assets and needs and define a project to work on to meet a need.

Materials:

- ✦ Pen and paper for each pair of participants.
- ✦ Large piece of paper divided into two columns – one titled Community Assets and the other titled Community Needs; markers

Directions:

(This activity may need to be split into two different sessions, one for the neighborhood walk and one for the discussion)

1. Agree upon what your group will identify as their community or neighborhood (e.g., the school campus, the school campus and five block radius, youth center and area within X, Y, and Z streets).
2. Walking in pairs, conduct a tour of the selected area and identify key places, organizations, and institutions in the community. Questions to consider: Where do people congregate? What are the most important businesses in the area? What recreation facilities, schools, associations, congregations, and other neighborhood institutions exist? Consider also social assets such as different cultures, ethnicities, and age groups. These will be identified as **community assets** – the good things the community has to offer.
3. As the group walks around, participants will also observe and write down what they consider to be needs or problems in the community. Do they encounter homeless people on the street? Are there safe, productive, and fun places for children to spend time after school? Are there any tensions among neighbors? What other problems or issues do they find? These will be identified as **community needs** – what the community is lacking and the problems it faces.
4. Come back as a group (the same day or on a different day) to share what you found, both as assets and as needs. A facilitator uses a large piece of paper and writes down participants' observations under the Assets column and the Needs column.

Discuss: What are common themes among the participants' observations?

5. Broaden the discussion by asking the group what items they would add to the lists, ie. other assets and needs that participants are aware of but may not have observed directly during their walk (e.g., a well known neighbor who is very active in the community and a youth-friendly store manager are assets; hunger is a need and so is the fact that elderly residents feel lonely.)
6. Have participants come up and place a check mark next to the **Need** they would like to address for their service-learning project. Count the check marks as votes: What needs does the group identify as a priority? The **need** with the most check marks is the one the group feels most strongly about addressing with their service-learning project. If there is more than one item checked several times, discuss whether it is feasible for your team to organize more than one project, or select one issue to address now and the other later with a new project.

Reflection:

- ✦ Create a neighborhood map with the most important places and institutions (**assets**) and mark where you identified **needs**. Mark assets and needs with different colors, symbols or notations.
- ✦ Write an opinion piece on what you discovered about your neighborhood and submit it to a local paper.
- ✦ Research how your congressional representative is voting on any of the issues you marked as needs. Contact him or her to express your opinion on their voting record on this issue.
- ✦ Contact a local organization you found most interesting, learn about its activities, and find out how you can get involved.
- ✦ Conduct research about the problem you identified as a priority in your community and write an article about some of its underlying causes. Do so by reading newspapers, interviewing people who know about this issue, and/or consulting relevant books or articles in the library or on the Internet.
- ✦ If this project will be performed for National & Global Youth Service Day, discuss the three main goals of the day and how your participation can help youth and others improve the community on this issue.
- ✦ Visit www.communityyouthmapping.org to view a host of resources identified by young people across the nation that may not be found in traditional directories.

For the reflection period:

- ✦ Read a story that addresses the problem the children will work on and discuss how the story relates to their project. How did the story characters solve the problem? Would they have solved it in the same way?

- ✦ Invite a speaker who has experience on the problem the children will work on to give them background information on the issue. Have the children present their project and ask questions from the speaker.
- ✦ Discuss with the children the meaning of the word Service. Have them explain how they will be helping their community by addressing the problem they have identified.
- ✦ If this project will be performed for National & Global Youth Service Day, discuss the three main goals of the day and how participation can help children and others improve their community.

Adapting the activity for young children:

Option a): Define an area for the children to walk around that is manageable depending on their age (e.g., the school building, the block around the school). Divide them into small groups, each one with an adult who helps them observe the positive things they find as well as what they think needs improvement.

Option b): Replace the walk with a group discussion where children list the positive things their community has and those they consider need improvement. Ask questions that help them focus their observations such as: “Describe your neighborhood”; “What do you like about it?”; “What do you see on your way to school?”; “What would you like to change?” List the “assets” and “needs” on two different columns.

Have the children vote on the community issue they would like to work on. Help them identify a problem that is feasible to focus on for their service-learning project so they will feel a sense of accomplishment when the project is completed.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACTION

Students in a service-learning class at Preuss High School launched a website for their school's chapter of Students for Organ and Tissue Donation. They also started community outreach efforts through presentations and chose to begin their program in April because of its designation as "Donate Life" month (along with National & Global Youth Service Day).

In addition to talking to students at lunchtime about the importance of organ donation, the group worked with teachers at the middle school and high school level to incorporate organ donor awareness into their lesson plans. By the end of their events, the students had talked with more than 2,000 people about the possibility of organ donation and signed up 200 new donors. They made sure to let everyone know that a single tissue and organ donation from one person can save up to 68 lives!

Before the service project, the Preuss High School chapter of Student for Organ and Tissue Donation had seven members. It now has 16 and counting. The reason for the growing enthusiasm? According to one of its members, "As young adolescents, we believe the words from our mouths will better resonate with the youth of our generation."

"Through service-learning, students have unique opportunities to learn the value of teamwork and build critical thinking skills while completing service project areas such as education, public safety and the environment. Studies have shown that students who participate in such programs demonstrate increased civic and social responsibility and improved academic achievement."

U.S. Secretary of Education
Margaret Spellings

Tool: Generating Project Ideas

Walk through the schoolyard or neighborhood with students, having them record (with a clipboard or camera) ideas for improvement. They can do a more thorough landscape survey by assessing the site history, microclimate, soil and plant life, land uses and school boundaries.

Use your own town as text, conducting a community tour (by bus or foot) planned in conjunction with community leaders. Discuss current issues and needs, then brainstorm possible projects.

Create a community map, identifying both positive and negative features, to help in brainstorming potential projects.

Organize a community fair, inviting agencies and organizations to bring displays. Students can practice their interviewing techniques, asking staff questions that may generate project ideas.

Invite a guest speaker or panel of presenters who may be working on relevant community issues.

Visit with students who are working on a service-learning project in another classroom or school to learn more about the process.

Have **students interview local officials** about challenges facing the community and how students might help address those needs.

Invite students to **undertake a community survey or needs assessment** involving citizens and/or local business owners.

Use a creative writing assignment to brainstorm project ideas.

Follow up on a compelling newspaper story. Sometimes a crisis – in the school or the community – can inspire action.