

## **Introduction to Asset-Mapping**

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2003

Every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.

Each time a person uses his or her capacity, the community is stronger and the person more powerful. That is why strong communities are basically places where the capacities of local residents are identified, valued and used. Weak communities are places that fail, for whatever reason, to mobilize the skills, capacities and talents of their residents or members.

While the raw material for community-building is the capacity of its individual members, some communities have failed to understand this. One of the reasons this basic resource is undeveloped in weak communities is because the community has come to focus largely on the deficiencies rather than the capacities of its members. This deficiency focus is usually described as a concern about the needs of local members. And these needs are understood to be the problems, shortcomings, maladies and dilemmas of people.

It is clear that every individual has needs or deficiencies. It is also clear that every individual has gifts and capacities. This fact reminds us of the glass of water filled to the middle. The glass is half full and it is half empty. Local residents, likewise, have capacities and they also have deficiencies. However, the part of people that builds powerful communities is the capacity part of its members. Therefore, the basic information needed to develop strong communities is an inventory of the capacities of its residents.

Unfortunately, in some communities local residents have come to mistakenly believe they can build their community by an inventory of deficiencies. The common name for this deficiency inventory is a “needs survey.” It is basically an effort to count up the emptiness in an individual or a neighborhood. The problem is that this information is not useful for community-building because it deals with people as potential clients and consumers. To be powerful, a community must have people who are citizens and producers.

Think of a carpenter who has lost one leg in an accident years ago. Clearly, he has a deficiency. However, he also has a skill. If we know he has a missing leg, we cannot build our community with that information. If we know he has a capacity as a wood worker, that information can literally build our community.

### **Mapping Individual Capacities: An Inventory**

In order to focus on the capacities of community members, it may be necessary to use a new tool that does not focus on needs. This tool is called a Capacity Inventory.

This particular Capacity Inventory was designed to identify the abilities of people in two older Chicago neighborhoods. Therefore, it is merely an example of one approach to identifying what local citizens can contribute to community-building. However, it has demonstrated its usefulness in communities across North America where it has been adapted for various groups, associations and neighborhoods.

The Capacity Inventory is divided into four parts. Look over each part before reading the

following description.

### **Part I -- Skills Information**

This section lists many skills people have learned at home, in the community or at their workplace. It is important to point out to people taking the inventory that it is more than a list of skills learned on paying jobs. Many people have valuable skills learned outside the workplace and these skills are often valuable to neighbors, community groups and employers. They can also be the basis for starting a new business.

The list was developed based upon the particular skills reported by lower income people in two inner-city neighborhoods. Therefore, the list should be understood as simply an example. It can be shortened or added to depending on the particular people being inventoried. For example, a very different list might be developed if school parents are being interviewed to determine what additional classes they could teach in the evening, what they could contribute to the operation of their children's school or what skills they could help young people develop.

Similarly, a different list might be developed based upon capacities of seniors in the neighborhood. What particular gifts can they offer, no matter how physically limited?

At the conclusion of the list of skills is a section called Priority Skills. Here, the person being interviewed is asked to identify their best skills as listed in questions A and B. This is usually the most important information in this section, because the person with the skills is usually best able to assess their own abilities. And, they are most likely to feel confident about these skills. Therefore, they are more likely to be willing to contribute them to the community or sell them in the marketplace.

These Priority Skills are the foundation of community building. Therefore, identifying and mobilizing these skills is the basic work of leaders, associations and local institutions that are building on the assets of the neighborhood.

### **Part II -- Community Skills**

This section identifies the kinds of community work the person has participated in and then asks what kind of work they would be willing to do in the future. The work the person is willing to do in the future is the "raw material" for community building. Connecting these potential gifts with local community groups is vital work for local leaders and asset building organizations.

The particular list of activities in this section is only one example. It should be amended or added to as appropriate in the neighborhood where it is used.

### **Part III -- Enterprising Interests and Experience**

This part seeks two kinds of information. First, it determines whether the person has considered starting a business. Second, it asks if they presently are engaged in a business of any kind.

In asking questions about business, it is important to emphasize that your group is interested in any kind of business activity. It could be babysitting, selling perfume to neighbors, sewing, repairing broken windows, lawn care, etc. Often, people will not call this activity a business. Therefore, the interviewer should make clear that any money-making activity is of interest. This is because most small businesses grow step-by-step and often, the most important step is the first one—the sale of any goods or services.

This leads to the most important information in Part III for asset developing leaders and groups.

This information is the answers to questions A4 and B5.

Question A4 identifies the barriers the person feels prevent them from starting some kind of enterprise. Helping remove these barriers is the work of asset developing leaders and groups.

Question B5 identifies the factors that could build the person's current business. Helping deal with these factors is the role of local leaders and groups committed to developing local capacities and assets.

#### **Part IV -- Personal Information**

The items listed are the minimum information usually necessary for follow-up. However, other information may be added if it is useful in developing the capacities of the person.

#### **Additional Advice for Groups Using the Capacity Inventory**

The wording of the Capacity Inventory is for use when one person is interviewing another person to gather the information. However, some groups have revised the wording so that the Inventory can be given to a person who will fill out the answers themselves. Also, the Inventory has been given to groups of people, each of whom fills it out at the same time. This allows one person to explain what to do and to answer questions while many people are filling in the information.

At first glance, the Inventory may seem to be very long. It may be necessary therefore, to cut it back and revise it for the individuals using it. However, it may be best to try to gather all the information possible and see whether people interviewed actually object. Often, people will provide a great deal of information if they feel the interviewer is genuinely interested and the answers will be used to help them or their community.

One problem that may be encountered in using the Capacity Inventory is that some people may feel it asks some questions that are too personal or private. This may be especially the case in regard to the questions about business interests and activities. Therefore, those who use the inventory must be sensitive to these concerns and tell people that they should not answer any questions they do not care to answer.

A few of the groups who have used the Capacity Inventory have told the person interviewed that the information will be kept confidential. However, they found that they couldn't use the information for capacity development because of this promise. They could only use the information for a general study summarizing numbers of skills or capacities. Unfortunately, this information is of little practical use to the people being interviewed and may contribute to their frustration or anger because they were "studied" rather than helped or given an opportunity to contribute.

This leads to the most important advice about using the Capacity Inventory. We have found there are two basic questions that determine whether the Capacity Inventory is a useful development tool.

First, is its basic purpose to gather information about a specific person in order to help that person contribute to the community, develop employment or businesses? Will the information help this person—Mary Jones—give her gifts, contribute her talents or increase her income? The purpose of the Inventory is to help a particular person contribute. If the information is not primarily used for this purpose, Mary Jones may feel "used" and her time wasted. This result will weaken the community by alienating people who often feel they are being uselessly "studied" by outsiders.

Therefore, it should be emphasized that the Capacity Inventory is not designed to do a study of neighborhood residents that will primarily result in tables and charts showing numbers of skills, activities and enterprises. If this kind of study is the primary outcome, the inventory will not lead to its basic purpose as a tool for developing the capacities of local residents.

The second basic question is to ask what will be done with the information collected from Mary Jones in order to help her to contribute her gifts, skills and capacities and develop her income or enterprise? This question should be answered in detail before beginning the inventory.

Therefore, the groups involved in asking the questions should first have a plan that outlines how they will:

- Connect Mary Jones' skills to other residents, associations, institutions or enterprises.

- Connect Mary Jones' community skills to local community groups or activities.

- Connect Mary Jones to individuals, groups, programs or financing that will assist her in creating or developing an enterprise.

In summary, the information in each of these four sections is not useful until local individuals, leaders, associations or organizations act to enable the capacities to be used. Community development is the process by which local capacities are identified and mobilized. This mobilization mainly involves connecting people with capacities to:

- other people
- local associations
- local businesses
- local institutions
- capital and credit.

Therefore, growing community power requires local groups focused upon connecting people's capacities so they can be useful.