

Needs Assessment versus Asset Mapping

Two ways exist to approach decisions regarding the start-up or sustainability of a byway. The old popular method is to identify needs (problems) and attempt to fix or solve them as they arise. This method can keep you locked into a paradigm that means you will have a long string of problems to fix. Like repairing leaks in a plumbing system, you may be fixing leaks forever. This fact sheet can help you look at the community differently and make your achievement of success easier and not burn out fighting fires.

Asset Mapping

Try focusing on the assets that you have in the community along the byway.

- What are the strong points?
- What are the valuable assets?
- What organizations and allies exist inside and outside your organization?

Asset mapping is a positive and constructive way of looking at the local environment. Build on the byway's strength, not weaknesses. When we dwell on problems and negative obstacles, we likely overlooked human, organizational or natural community assets.

"Community needs to be at the center of our thinking, no matter what results we are trying to achieve in the world."

Above is a quote by [Peter Block and John McKnight](#), co-authors of *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*.

Asset mapping is a means of conducting an inventory of the human and economic capacities of a community or region. This community development approach entails the identification of the wealth of talent and resources located along the byway. The development and long range planning at the community-level must incorporate a strategy of linking physical resources, people with talents, and community-

based strengths to advance quality of life and opportunity for success. The rationale to address community concerns calls for renewed focus on strengths and opportunities to improve the well-being of your byway.

Social researchers point out that communities are built from the inside out. The fundamental dimension is the mobilization and linking of community-based resources to the byway. It is not something done to a byway, but through all the linkages with the byway.

Asset mapping - three important characteristics:

Asset-based - This is a description and analysis of what abilities exist among the people, the social organizations, and the institutions affected by the byway. The focus is on existing assets and not on what is lacking (Kretzmann, 2003).

Internally-focused - The process is driven by people and advice drawn from elements along the byway. The byway team must discover their region's own strengths and capabilities.

Relationship Driven - The third essential aspect emphasizes teamwork and communication where understandings are shared. The concept of community spirit enhances the bonds and common ground that cuts across all value systems, all groups, geographic areas, and institutional areas in the byway locale.

The assumption is that all individuals, regardless of their station in life, have something to contribute. All people have some identifiable talents and

skills. Human capacity must be recognized and "tapped" for the benefit of the byway.

Source: Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993.