

A “Walk Through the Asset Mapping Process” Companion Guide

This list will guide you through the signage and imagery used in the “Walk Through Asset Mapping Process” graphic tool below.

How to Use This Tool

In the “Walk Through the Asset Mapping Process” illustration, a young community organizer embarks on a walk through her neighborhood’s landscape.

Imagine that you’re walking with her. As you meander along, you’ll encounter a series of signs and images related to the asset-mapping process. This Companion Guide describes these asset-mapping elements, and is designed to provide practitioners like you with important recommendations that will prepare you to lead an asset-mapping exercise and engage other stakeholders alongside you.

The order of elements on this list corresponds roughly to the order in which the signs and images appear in the illustration. By the end of your virtual walk, you will have gained important insights about the asset-mapping process, how to conduct it, and the value it adds to inclusive community-building work.



SIGNAGE

Clean Up – We all have a role to play in keeping our community tidy. A cleanup of a vacant lot, street, park, trail, or river can become a gateway to new opportunity as residents and neighbors come together for a common cause and share an experience and perhaps a conversation. You never know what might come from the seemingly simple act of cleaning up in a neighborhood.

Scenic Route – Like a long road trip, the asset mapping process is an extended occasion to stop and explore all the different sights you encounter along the way. Whether exploring someplace new or working to see different programs and stakeholders through fresh eyes, asset mapping is a chance to step off the main thoroughfare and see what intriguing things might be located along a side street or a more scenic route.

Detour – Sometimes a conversation with a local stakeholder yields different results than you anticipated, or you might get a referral to a person you didn't know existed. Treat these experiences as you would a road closure due to construction: a minor change that requires you to navigate a different way by veering off your more familiar path. Although different, the detour route offers a potential opportunity for discovering something or someone new.

Expect Delays – There are times when you miss a person's office hours, or they're out sick when you come by, or the follow-up email someone promised just doesn't show up. Delays are a routine part of asset mapping, and you should factor additional time into your asset-mapping plan to account for them.

Work Arounds Required – Sometimes when you're asset mapping (or doing any community- building work, really) you'll encounter a barrier of some kind—a "closed" sign on a storefront, a zoning regulation that prevents common-sense amenities from being developed in the neighborhood, or, more likely, a stakeholder who doesn't see the possibilities you see in forging a partnership. These occasions will require you to get creative to find a different path toward what you're looking for.

This Way Toward Ideas – Sure, you and your team might have a great idea for a new initiative in your community, but what are the prevailing opinions of people on the ground? This sign posts a reminder to get out into the "real world," engage in conversations, and solicit input and ideas from every single person you meet. You never know what new information you'll pick up.

Unpredictable Terrain Ahead – Asset mapping can feel a little overwhelming at times because, by nature, it is an open-ended process that unfolds as you go. For the most fruitful process results, we encourage you to embrace this unpredictability in the same way you might approach a scavenger hunt: carry with you a sense of wonder and curiosity so you can find those "happy accidents" you didn't know you were looking for along the way.

Collaboration Ahead – Rarely in community building do we go it alone, and an asset-mapping process should be no different. Link up with friends, neighbors, organizational partners, and local businesses and institutions to spread the word about your process and why you're leading it. Collaborators can often become great friends, and studies show that communities whose stakeholders are connected are more likely to weather natural disasters or other tragedies with greater resilience.

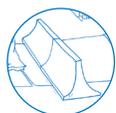
Birds-Eye View – In asset mapping, the act of "zooming in" and "zooming out" helps us gain critically important perspective. Why are we trying to reach out to and connect organizations that aren't aware of each other and their respective missions? To encourage each other to collaborate, share information, and become a more potent community-building movement. How is one vacant lot different than a small green portion of a larger greenway of interconnected parcels? It's a matter of perspective.

Brainstorm – When you meet new people, getting their ideas on what they love about their community and what they wish they could change about it will tell you a great deal about their core values and priorities. The act of brainstorming in the presence of others can be an energizing experience for stakeholders, lead to identification of a common vision, and move the group from ideas to planning to action.

Vision – One way to encourage people to plug in and make a difference in their community—and to sustain that engagement over time—is to collectively define a broad vision for the community’s future in which many different stakeholders can see themselves participating. An example is a vision for a greenway, a system of parks and open spaces inhabiting formerly vacant or contaminated parcels located along a currently fenced-off waterway that could be interconnected by a trail and common signage along its length.

Action – Moving from brainstorming to vision to action is a necessary course of events in community-building work. Action can be characterized as the tangible activities people do to make a difference in their community, whether volunteer tutoring, cleaning up a vacant lot, or organizing a neighborhood block party.

IMAGERY



Jersey barrier road block – An image that speaks to the barriers we encounter in community- building work for which creative new paths—or “work arounds”—may be required to achieve our intended goal.



School, bank, church, bodega storefront – These images suggest the diverse cross-section of storefronts, businesses, and institutions that make up a community.



Broom sweeping up litter – An image alongside the “clean up” sign that indicates how all citizens and stakeholders can take ownership of our community’s image. Doing so can become an incredibly strong source of community-wide pride.



Cracks in the sidewalk – A suggestion to start where we are, cracks and all. We can work to repair and renew our communities, but first we must embrace and accept where, who, and what we are so we can go about changing for the better if we so desire.



Abundant raised garden bed – Abundance and renewal can be found in even the most unlikely places. The bounty of a community garden is a powerful symbol of hope, renewal, health, wellness, and community. We must plant the seeds of change together by connecting with one another, setting an intention, and sticking to it even when the going gets tough.



Residents tending meat on the barbeque together – Sharing food with other people is a great way to get to know them. When we share a meal, we are sharing conversation and culture.



Elder resident sitting on a bench holding hands with a row of stakeholders – Our lives and our community-building experiences are richer when multiple generations and people from a variety of walks of life are engaged together.



Clock, calendar, time – Important symbols to remind us that developing trusting relationships and partnerships with other people and partners takes time; that place-based transformation projects can take years; and that managing community transformation and change can take decades.



Smokestacks – A part of the post-industrial landscape in many former manufacturing communities, this image also reminds us of how air quality is a key component of a healthy community.



Bicycle leaning against a bridge over a river – Healthy communities are those that offer multiple ways to get from one place to another. Bike- and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure is critically important to creating a vibrant community.



Community organizer getting off the city bus – This “stepping off the bus” image is meant as a reminder that engaging people authentically means connecting with them by going out into the community to meet them where they are, rather than expecting them to come to you.



Teens playing basketball – You can engage community members of all ages; young people can frequently be found on basketball courts.



Bird in flight enjoying high-up vantage point – Asset mapping is an exercise in which we can gain tremendous perspective about a community. Upon first meeting, the people and organizations we encounter through asset mapping may appear to focus on a singular mission. But, when viewed through another stakeholder’s eyes, or within the context of other organizations’ work or emerging opportunities, we may come to see new possibilities for synergy or collaborative work that we didn’t see before.
