

Module Two

Identifying Community Assets

Identifying Community Assets

MODULE TWO INTRODUCES PARTICIPANTS to the theory and practice of asset-based community development pioneered by John Kretzmann and John McKnight of Northwestern University. The *LeadershipPlenty Training Program* embraces an asset orientation to community change. This emphasis on the assets of neighborhoods and communities and people is quite different from the many community-development strategies that focus on the deficits of communities. Rather than concentrating on the needs of individuals and communities, Kretzmann and McKnight advocate for a fundamental change of mindset that identifies the talents of individuals and the assets of communities, such as associations and civic organizations, and mobilizes these positive forces to improve communities.

A key objective of the *LeadershipPlenty Training Program* is equipping participants to identify their own gifts and the assets in their communities and to mobilize these capacities to solve tough problems. The following description of asset-based community development is excerpted from the introduction to *Building Communities From the Inside Out*, by Kretzmann and McKnight. The asset-based approach was initially envisioned as a strategy to strengthen urban neighborhoods, and that is the emphasis of the following excerpt. However, although Kretzmann and McKnight's original research examined problem solving in urban neighborhoods, successive work has demonstrated how the asset-based approach to community development is creating innovative solutions in smaller cities and rural areas. (Visit, for example, the sustainable development programs in western North Carolina spearheaded by HandMade in America: www.wnccrafts.org.) The "plenty" in *LeadershipPlenty* reflects the wealth of capacities that can be mobilized in communities to address complex issues and build a better future for all citizens.

The following description of asset-based community development is reprinted with permission from John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, (Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993). Web site: www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html

From Building Communities From the Inside Out

THE PROBLEM: DEVASTATED COMMUNITIES

No one can doubt that most American cities these days are deeply troubled places. At the root of the problems are the massive economic shifts that have marked the last two decades. Hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs have either disappeared or moved away from the central city and its neighborhoods. And while many downtown areas have experienced a “renaissance,” the jobs created there are different from those that once sustained neighborhoods. Either these new jobs are highly professionalized, and require elaborate education and credentials for entry, or they are routine, low-paying service jobs without much of a future. In effect, these shifts in the economy, and particularly the disappearance of decent employment possibilities from low-income neighborhoods, have removed the bottom rung from the fabled American “ladder of opportunity.” For many people in older city neighborhoods, new approaches to rebuilding their lives and communities, new openings toward opportunity, are a vital necessity.

TWO SOLUTIONS, TWO PATHS

In response to this desperate situation, well-intentioned people are seeking solutions by taking one of two divergent paths. The first, which begins by focusing on a community’s needs, deficiencies, and problems, is still by far the most traveled, and commands the vast majority of our financial and human resources. By comparison with the second path, which insists on beginning with a clear commitment to discovering a community’s capacities and assets, and which is the direction this guide recommends, the first and more traditional path is more like an eight-lane superhighway.

THE TRADITIONAL PATH— A NEEDS-DRIVEN DEAD END

For most Americans, the names “South Bronx,” or “South Central Los Angeles,” or even “Public Housing” call forth a rush of images. It is not surprising that these images are overwhelmingly negative. They are images of crime and violence, of joblessness and welfare dependency, of gangs and drugs and homelessness, of vacant and abandoned land and buildings. They are images of needy and problematic and deficient neighborhoods populated by needy and problematic and deficient people.

Once accepted as the whole truth about troubled neighborhoods, this “needs” map determines how problems are to be addressed, through deficiency-oriented policies and programs. Public, private and nonprofit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate the programs into local activities that teach people the nature and extent of their problems, and the value of services as the answer to their problems. As a result, many lower income urban neighborhoods are now environments of service where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being depends upon being a client. They begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. They become consumers of services with no incentive to be producers. Consumers of services focus vast amounts of creativity and intelligence on the survival-motivated challenge of outwitting the “system,” or on finding ways—in the informal or even illegal economy—to bypass the system entirely.

The fact that the deficit orientation represented by the needs map constitutes our only guide to lower income neighborhoods has devastating consequences for residents. We have already noted one of the most

tragic—that is, residents themselves begin to accept that map as the only guide to the reality of their lives. They think of themselves and their neighbors as fundamentally deficient, victims incapable of taking charge of their lives and of their community's future.

THE ALTERNATIVE PATH: CAPACITY-FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT

Because of the negative consequences of a total reliance on the needs or deficit-based approach to community development, an alternative asset-based approach becomes imperative. That alternative path, very simply, leads toward the development of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills and assets of lower income people and their neighborhoods.

In addition to the problems associated with the dominant deficiency model, at least two more factors argue for shifting to a capacity-oriented emphasis. First, all of the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. This observation explains why communities are never built from the top down, or from the outside in. (Clearly, however, valuable outside assistance can be provided to communities that are actively developing their own assets.)

The second reason for emphasizing the development of the internal assets of local urban neighborhoods is that the prospect for outside help is bleak indeed. Even in areas designated as Enterprise Zones, the odds are long that large-scale, job-providing industrial or service corporations will be locating in these neighborhoods. Nor is it likely in the light of continuing budget constraints, that significant new inputs of federal money will be forthcoming soon. It is increasingly

futile to wait for significant help to arrive from outside the community. The hard truth is that development must start from within the community and, in most of our urban neighborhoods, there is no other choice.

Creative neighborhood leaders across the country have begun to recognize this hard truth, and have shifted their practices accordingly. They are discovering that wherever there are effective community development efforts, those efforts are based upon an understanding, or map, of the community's assets, capacities and abilities. For it is clear that even the poorest neighborhood is a place where individuals and organizations represent resources upon which to rebuild. The key to neighborhood regeneration, then, is to locate all of the available local assets, to begin connecting them with one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes.

The entire process begins with the construction of a new "map," a new mind set that focuses on community assets, rather than community needs. Once this guide to capacities has replaced the old one containing only needs and deficiencies, the regenerating community can begin to assemble its strengths into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production.

THE ASSETS OF A COMMUNITY: INDIVIDUALS, ASSOCIATIONS, INSTITUTIONS

Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents. Household by household, building by building, block by block, the capacity mapmakers will discover a vast

From Building Communities From the Inside Out

and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills, few of which are being mobilized for community-building purposes. This basic truth about the “giftedness” of every individual is particularly important to apply to persons who often find themselves marginalized by communities. It is essential to recognize the capacities, for example, of those who have been labeled mentally handicapped or disabled, or of those who are marginalized because they are too old, or too young, or too poor. In a community whose assets are being fully recognized and mobilized, these people too will be part of the action, not as clients or recipients of aid, but as full contributors to the community-building process. In addition to mapping the gifts and skills of individuals, and of households and families, the committed community builder will compile an inventory of citizens’ associations. These associations, less formal and much less dependent upon paid staff than are formal institutions, are the vehicles through which citizens in the U.S. assemble to solve problems, or to share common interests and activities. It is usually the case that the depth and extent of associational life in any community is vastly underestimated. This is particularly true of lower income communities. In fact, however, though some parts of associational life may have dwindled in very low-income neighborhoods, most communities continue to harbor significant numbers of associations with religious, cultural, athletic,

recreational and other purposes. Community builders soon recognize that these groups are indispensable tools for development, and that many of them can in fact be stretched beyond their original purposes and intentions to become full contributors to the development process.

Beyond the individuals and local associations that make up the asset base of communities are all of the more formal institutions, which are located in the community. Private businesses; public institutions such as schools, libraries, parks, police and fire stations; nonprofit institutions such as hospitals and social service agencies—these organizations make up the most visible and formal part of a community’s fabric. Accounting for them in full, and enlisting them in the process of community development, is essential to the success of the process. For community builders, the process of mapping the institutional assets of the community will often be much simpler than that of making an inventory involving individuals and associations. But establishing within each institution a sense of responsibility for the health of the local community, along with mechanisms that allow communities to influence and even control some aspects of the institution’s relationships with its local neighborhood, can prove much more difficult. Nevertheless, a community that has located and mobilized its entire base of assets will clearly feature heavily involved and invested local institutions.

Individuals, associations, and institutions—these three major categories contain within them much of the asset base of every community. Module Two focuses on helping participants shift from a needs mindset to an asset mindset and introduces them to the tools of identifying or “mapping” the assets in their community.

Identifying Community Assets

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *LeadershipPlenty* highlights the diversity of people in every community who are its potential leaders. Improving our communities begins when we tap this *LeadershipPlenty* in our midst. The first step, covered in Module One, is for individuals to identify the unique gifts they can contribute to community leadership. This understanding prepares people to help others unleash their own leadership abilities. And ultimately people working together can engage networks of leaders and mobilize organizations and associations to build a better community. The activities in this second module will give participants an opportunity to train their eyes on the leadership assets in their community and brainstorm about how these assets can be mobilized for change. The purpose of this module is to develop in participants an understanding and appreciation of the assets model for community change and to set forth strategies to uncover and bring together leadership assets within an organization and in the community at large.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Participants will learn to distinguish between an asset-based approach and a deficit-based approach to community development.
- 2 Participants will learn positive, creative, and nontraditional ways to recognize and work with leadership assets within their organizations and the greater community.
- 3 Participants will experience the synergistic power of bringing the community's assets together.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What difference will it make to look at our community through its assets rather than its deficits?
- 2 How can we go about discovering undervalued assets in our community?
- 3 What happens when we bring the leadership assets of our community together?

Materials and Equipment

Flip chart paper

Markers in different colors, masking tape

Name tags

3" x 5" index cards

Copies of local newspaper articles

Participant Handouts (see below)

Participant Handouts

Introduction to Module Two

LeadershipPlenty Group Profile

Newspaper Article

Discussion Questions

Scavenger Hunt Cards

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993). Telephone: 800-397-2282. Web site: www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html

The introduction of this book overviews this module's theme of building a community through its assets. Chapter Five offers specific strategies for asset-based community development.

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Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

This book offers twelve basic principles of adult learning illustrated through an educator's experiences across the globe. Good background material for community educators who work with diverse groups of people.

SUGGESTED ROOM ARRANGEMENT(S)

Place chairs in a circle or U-shape, so that all participants can see each other as well as the facilitator and the area where visuals will be displayed. The room needs to be large enough for participants to separate into several small groups and talk quietly unless space is available elsewhere in the building.

Session Script

SESSION OVERVIEW

Introduction	10 Minutes
Ice-Breaker	45 Minutes
Assets v. Deficit Approach to Community	55 Minutes
Break	15 Minutes
Creative Ways to Recognize Leadership Assets	55 Minutes
Lunch	60 Minutes
Bringing Emerging and Established Leadership Together	40 Minutes
Break	15 Minutes
The Power of Synergy	35 Minutes
Evaluation and Closure	30 Minutes
Total Time	6 Hours

Introduction

10 Minutes

Begin the session by introducing yourself and your position. Explain that you will be facilitating today's session. Here are some suggested remarks to introduce the topic of the session to participants:

This second module builds on Module One's exploration of the unique gifts individuals bring to community leadership. In Module Two we will turn our attention to the leadership assets of the community as a whole by:

- 1 Identifying untapped leadership
- 2 Recognizing community assets
- 3 Mobilizing organizations and associations

The purpose of today's session is for you to understand and appreciate the assets approach to community change and to set forth strategies to uncover and bring together leadership assets within your organization and in the community at large.

Explain how the major blocks of time will be spent in Module Two. A flip chart can display the topics to be covered during the session:

LeadershipPlenty
Module Two

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY ASSETS

Morning Session:

What does it mean to look at our community through its assets rather than its deficits?

BREAK

How do we discover undervalued assets in teams and in the greater community?

LUNCH

Afternoon Session:

How can we be more inclusive in identifying our community's leadership potential?

BREAK

What happens when we bring the leadership assets of our community together?

Evaluation and Closure

ON THE FLIP CHART

Transition

You might say to the group, "We'll begin with an activity that will introduce the idea of *LeadershipPlenty* and also provide a way for us to get to know one another better."

Ice-Breaker 45 Minutes

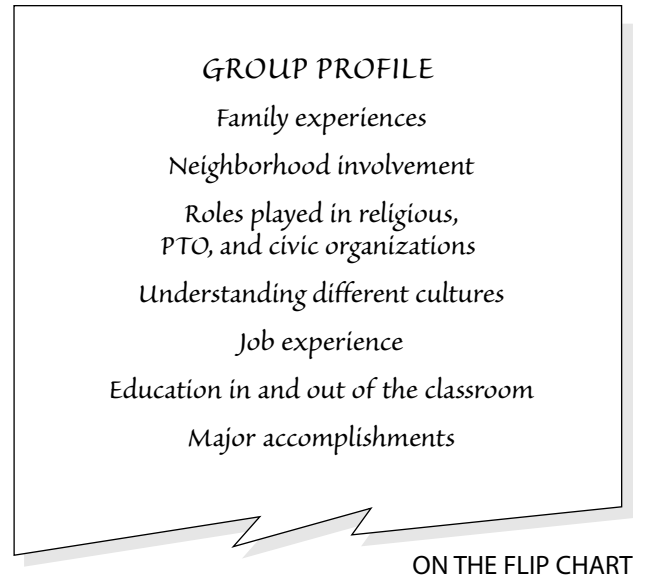
This activity helps develop rapport, emphasizes the group's assets, and begins a team-building process.

ACTIVITY: GROUP PROFILE (Approximately 30 Minutes)

Materials: Flip chart paper, markers, tape, and copies of Handout #3, *LeadershipPlenty Group Profile* for every member.

- ➊ Divide participants into small groups of three to six.
- ➋ Remind participants of the opportunity they had in *LeadershipPlenty's* first module to reflect on what each of them brings to the experience of community leadership. They will now bring these energies and abilities together.
- ➌ Tell each group that it represents an impressive collection of talents and experience and that one way to identify and promote these resources is to compose a Group Profile.

The finished Group Profile may include any of the following information:



Tip: Encourage participants to think creatively about their experience and accomplishments. For example, raising a child and learning to live in a new culture are major accomplishments. Knowing how to repair a car or play a musical instrument or take care of an elderly relative all represent expertise and experience that can contribute to community change. Pose questions such as, “What do you enjoy doing?” and “What kind of things do people ask for your help with?”

DEBRIEFING (Approximately 15 Minutes)

Reconvene the large group and ask each team to present its profile. Celebrate the total resources contained within the entire group.

Suggested probes

- ❶ Were there assets that you were surprised to unearth among the participants?
- ❷ Were there examples of “unusual” assets that were discovered?

Transition

You can introduce the next topic by referring to observations made during the ice-breaker. Example: “If you were surprised at the wealth of talent in this room, keep this in mind when we look at the ways that we tend to think about our communities.”

Assets v. Deficit Approach to Community Change

55 Minutes

Begin this session with a brief description of the deficit approach to community change. (*Approximately 10 Minutes*)

Learning to distinguish between asset thinking and deficit thinking

ON THE FLIP CHART

The message of deficit thinking goes something like this, for example:

Our communities are in trouble. We see images of:

- Urban neighborhoods devastated by shifts in the economy
- Sprawl in the suburbs
- Rural areas lacking economic opportunities

When we look at our communities in this way, we see them primarily as problems needing solutions. This negative perspective can discourage people from becoming involved in efforts to improve where they live. Overwhelmed with the challenges, people can overlook all the positive things happening in their communities. People can feel as if they do not have the expertise and experience to be able to make a difference, or that the problems are just too enormous to tackle.

Tip: For an in-depth discussion of mapping communities by assets rather than deficits, consult *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, listed in the Supplemental Resources section.

Transition

To introduce the following activity you could say, “We’re going to do some group work now that will give you an opportunity to examine real-life evidence of this.”

This activity prompts participants to recognize and question what happens when we see a community only in terms of its problems.

ACTIVITY: NEWS ARTICLE CRITIQUE (20 Minutes)

Ahead of Time: Find an article in your local paper that focuses on a community problem such as crime, education, or sprawl. When you are selecting the article, draw on your knowledge of the participants and the neighborhoods in which they live. Ideally, the issue addressed in the article will reflect participants’ concerns. Articles of this kind seem to be especially prevalent in the metro section of local papers and in community weeklies.

Materials: Flip chart paper and markers for each group, copies of the newspaper article and of Handout #2, *Newspaper Article Discussion Questions*, for each participant.

Divide participants into small groups, with three to six members in each. The group will need to choose a reader, a scribe, and a spokesperson to report its findings to the

large group. Briefly go over the list of discussion questions and be sure everyone understands the directions.

Suggest that someone in each group read the article aloud, as others follow along. After the reading, the group should discuss the questions on the handout.

A spokesperson from each group then reports highlights from its discussion to the whole group:

- ❶ Post the sheet of "negative language" on the wall for everyone to see.
- ❷ Verbally share the group's responses to the discussion questions.

(Allow a couple of minutes per group)

DEBRIEFING *(Approximately 15 Minutes)*

Form a fish bowl configuration. Ask one small group to form the inner circle with the remaining participants forming a larger outer circle. This circle within a larger circle forms a fish bowl. Have people in the inner circle reconstruct their article in a more positive light while people in the outer circle observe silently. Discussion questions might be:

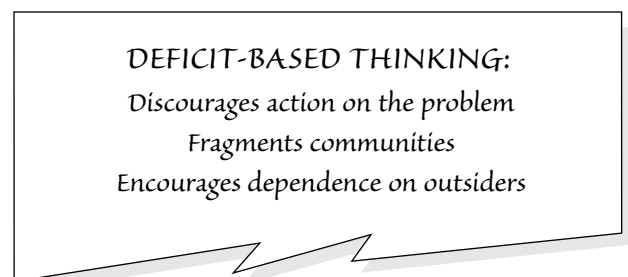
- ❶ What community assets could locals tell you about that were left out of the article?
- ❷ Do any of the deficits in this community have a positive side?

Then invite the people in the outer circle to add their insights to the discussion. *(10 Minutes)*

Variations:

- ❶ Lead a general discussion about the effects of negative reporting on the community and how this reflects on its image.
- ❷ Prior to the session, ask participants to clip an article from a newspaper that focuses on a community issue. Conduct the preceding activity by having individuals examine the articles they brought, rather than having groups examine the single article selected by the facilitator.

Be sure the following key points have been explored during the activity:



ON THE FLIP CHART

Participants will begin replacing the negative perspective with a positive one.

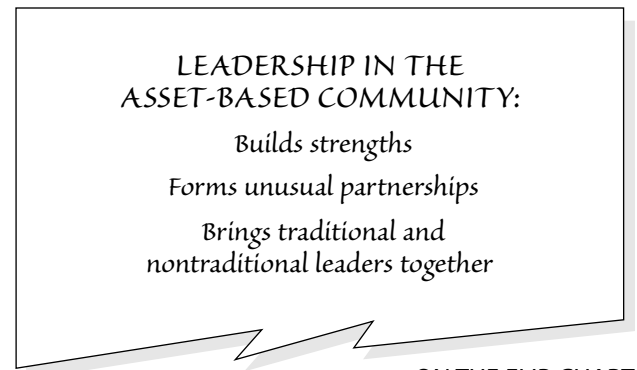
Transition

You might say, "Clearly we need a better way to look at our communities. We will see how to do this when we return from break."

Break*(15 Minutes)*

Creative Ways to Recognize Leadership Assets
55 Minutes

Once participants understand the deficit concept, it is time to introduce the premise of *LeadershipPlenty: The Asset-based Community*. *(10 Minutes)*



Asset-based Community Leadership:

- ❶ Creates new ways of tapping the resources that lie within the community.
- ❷ Values local expertise before seeking outside help. “Outsiders,” whether government officials, business leaders, or other “expert” consultants, should respect and value the knowledge and input of local residents. Such outsiders can contribute to community-change efforts, but history has shown that long-term community change is only successful when based on local perspectives and commitment.
- ❸ Forms relationships between community groups. Bringing people together whose paths do not normally cross creates new patterns, new ideas. People listen to the perspectives of others and build commitment to a common goal.

In this activity, participants will begin the process of building community leadership from within.

ACTIVITY: RESOURCE SCAVENGER HUNT *(Approximately 30 Minutes)*

Materials: A Scavenger Hunt Card and a pencil for each participant.

Tip: The suggested cards in Handout #3 describe hypothetical community projects, for example “A new community initiative to study urban sprawl.” Feel free to create your own projects in line with current happenings in your area.

Give each person a card describing a neighborhood project for which he or she is responsible. Ask participants to move about the room looking for people who can offer resources for this project. Encourage creativity to find matches that work. For example, the gardener, whom they learned about during the group profile activity, could offer landscaping expertise. Tell participants to find as many resources as they can and write those people’s names and interests on their cards.

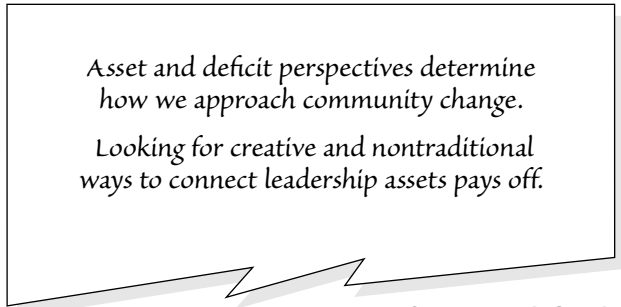
The purpose here is for participants to think creatively and to rely on each other as they work to meet their goals.

Bring everyone back together after 30 minutes and have volunteers read their project description and the resource matches they have made.

DEBRIEFING (Approximately 15 Minutes)

Open-ended questions such as “What did you discover during your search?” or “What were some of the more creative matches you made between community needs and the assets in this group?” encourage reflection and a discussion of how this approach could work in the wider community leadership potential beyond this room.

Summarize the key points of the session thus far:



ON THE FLIP CHART

Transition	Point out the note on which the morning session is ending. There are creative ways to uncover the assets of a community. This afternoon's session will bring these assets together.
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Lunch	(1 Hour)
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Bringing Emerging and Established Leadership Together
40 Minutes

Embracing both emerging and established leadership resources for community building.

Next, we will explore the need to engage both the established leadership and the emerging leadership of a community in change efforts. It is important to balance this morning's emphasis on emerging leaders who are sometimes overlooked with the role that established institutions in the community can play. Real and lasting community change needs to engage the whole community, including institutions such as city and county government, businesses, and foundations. Give participants an opportunity to talk about this idea in relationship to their own communities. (Approximately 10 Minutes)

ACTIVITY: CONNECTING EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED LEADERS (30 Minutes)

Materials: Flip chart and markers.

Ask participants to return to form two groups.

Ask one group to consider which people and institutions are part of the “established” leadership. Have the second group do the same for “emerging” leadership. Encourage participants to consider who the emerging and established leaders are in their own communities.

Once the groups have reported their ideas, pose additional discussion questions such as:

- ❶ How can established and emerging or nontraditional leaders work together in our own communities?
- ❷ What are the challenges that accompany this effort?

DEBRIEFING

Conclude the session by reviewing the most recent flip chart page, pictured previously (p. 13), adding a third key point: Community-change efforts can engage both established and emerging leaders.

Break

(15 Minutes)

The Power of Synergy 35 Minutes

This activity is not about rushing to solutions! The goal here is to get lots of ideas out in the room so everyone can see how the synergy builds.

A quick definition of “synergy” is in order.

Webster’s Dictionary says that the word “synergy” comes from the Greek word meaning “working together,” but most people think the phrase, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” describes it well. Once the definition is established, go straight into the activity below. The experience will speak for itself.

ACTIVITY: BRAINSTORMING (25 Minutes)

Materials: Several sheets of flip chart paper, markers, and tape for each group. You will need a list of community issues, enough to give a different one to each team.

Spend a minute or two explaining how brainstorming works. In this case, it is saying and writing down *everything* that comes to mind about a particular topic without censorship, even wild and crazy notions.

- ❶ Divide the group into teams and instruct each team to choose a station on the wall and post its sheets.
- ❷ Each team should elect its fastest, most legible writer to be the scribe.
- ❸ Explain that this is a timed activity and that they should not begin until they are told to do so.
- ❹ Tell them that in just a moment you are going to be assigning each team a community issue of shared concern (living-wage jobs, eldercare, neighborhood safety, or after-school programs, for instance) that it will then brainstorm. Participants will call out whatever comes to mind related to that topic—ways to deal with it, potential consequences, *whatever*. Each team’s scribe will get as many ideas as possible down on paper.

- 5 Teams will first work on the topic in front of them and then, when prompted, move clockwise to the next station. As they move to a new station they will read quickly what others have written, then brainstorm again. It's okay to repeat when ideas overlap and to build on those already listed.
- 6 Teams will continue around the room until each group has contributed to all the topics.

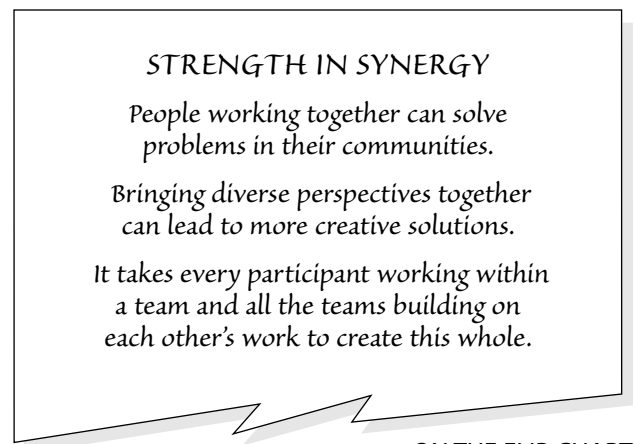
Give the topic to each team and have the scribe write it at the top of the first sheet. Be sure everyone understands what to do.

Set the pace with an energetic "Ready, Set, Go." With some quick arithmetic around the number of teams and how much time is left, you can determine when to call time and move the teams briskly to each station.

Variation: If space is limited, teams can do this activity while seated in small groups. Each team writes its ideas on sheets of 8½" x 11" paper and then passes them around to each of the other groups.

DEBRIEFING (10 Minutes)

The final products will show the build-up of group energy as well as the synergy created by the process. Channel this energy toward a discussion of how synergy can work in a community setting.



ON THE FLIP CHART

Transition

Draw everyone's attention back to the session objectives.

Evaluation and Closure

30 Minutes

Review the four objectives as they were covered throughout the day. (5 Minutes)

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Participants will learn to distinguish between an asset-based approach and a deficit-based approach to community development.
- 2 Participants will learn positive, creative, and nontraditional ways to recognize assets within their organizations and the greater community.
- 3 Participants will experience the synergistic power of bringing a community's assets together.

This is the time for participants to apply the day's activities to their own community involvement.

Here is some sample wording for the review:

- We started the morning by discovering how our individual leadership assets came together in this room by doing the Group Profile.
- Then we looked at both asset and deficit views of our communities. We examined how our own viewpoints affect the way we approach solutions.
- By scavenging for resources within our group, we experimented with creative ways of connecting assets, sometimes in rather nontraditional ways.
- In the afternoon session, we looked at how established and emerging leaders can work together.
- We ended by demonstrating the creation of synergy around community change.

Give participants a few minutes to think about what they have learned. Ask them to think about how they would now answer these guiding questions in their own work:

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ❶ What difference does it make if we look at our community through its assets rather than its deficits?
- ❷ How can we go about discovering undervalued assets in teams and in the greater community?
- ❸ What happens when we bring the leadership assets of our community together?

Some may want to share their thoughts. You can encourage discussion by asking questions such as, "Is there a question here that you're still unsure of?" or "Were you surprised by an issue that these questions bring up in your own work?" It is possible that unresolved leadership concerns will be covered in future *LeadershipPlenty* modules.

For those who plan to continue the *LeadershipPlenty* series, suggest that they observe carefully at the next group meeting they attend how the various roles and relationships play out. Do they observe any problems that seem to affect the dynamics of the group? What are some effective ways they see leaders handling group dynamics? These issues will be addressed in Module Three, *Managing Groups For Results*.

As a last activity, ask participants to take out their notebooks and write down one thing they will do differently in response to what they have learned today. Encourage volunteers to share what they have written if time allows. (10 Minutes)

Note: If you choose, have participants complete a session evaluation form before they leave. (5 Minutes)

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Web site: www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html

THE PROBLEM: DEVASTATED COMMUNITIES

No one can doubt that most American cities these days are deeply troubled places. At the root of the problems are the massive economic shifts that have marked the last two decades. Hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs have either disappeared or moved away from the central city and its neighborhoods. And while many downtown areas have experienced a “renaissance,” the jobs created there are different from those that once sustained neighborhoods. Either these new jobs are highly professionalized, and require elaborate education and credentials for entry, or they are routine, low-paying service jobs without much of a future. In effect, these shifts in the economy, and particularly the disappearance of decent employment possibilities from low-income neighborhoods, have removed the bottom rung from the fabled American “ladder of opportunity.” For many people in older city neighborhoods, new approaches to rebuilding their lives and communities, new openings toward opportunity, are a vital necessity.

TWO SOLUTIONS, TWO PATHS

In response to this desperate situation, well-intentioned people are seeking solutions by taking one of two divergent paths. The first, which begins by focusing on a community’s needs, deficiencies, and problems, is still by far the most traveled, and commands the vast majority of our financial and human resources. By comparison with the second path, which insists on beginning with a clear commitment to discovering a community’s

capacities and assets, and which is the direction this guide recommends, the first and more traditional path is more like an eight-lane superhighway.

THE TRADITIONAL PATH— A NEEDS-DRIVEN DEAD END

For most Americans, the names “South Bronx,” or “South Central Los Angeles,” or even “Public Housing” call forth a rush of images. It is not surprising that these images are overwhelmingly negative. They are images of crime and violence, of joblessness and welfare dependency, of gangs and drugs and homelessness, of vacant and abandoned land and buildings. They are images of needy and problematic and deficient neighborhoods populated by needy and problematic and deficient people.

Once accepted as the whole truth about troubled neighborhoods, this “needs” map determines how problems are to be addressed, through deficiency-oriented policies and programs. Public, private and non-profit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate the programs into local activities that teach people the nature and extent of their problems, and the value of services as the answer to their problems. As a result, many lower income urban neighborhoods are now environments of service where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being depends upon being a client. They begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. They become consumers of services with no incentive to be producers. Consumers of services

focus vast amounts of creativity and intelligence on the survival-motivated challenge of outwitting the “system,” or on finding ways—in the informal or even illegal economy—to bypass the system entirely.

The fact that the deficit orientation represented by the needs map constitutes our only guide to lower income neighborhoods has devastating consequences for residents. We have already noted one of the most tragic—that is, residents themselves begin to accept that map as the only guide to the reality of their lives. They think of themselves and their neighbors as fundamentally deficient, victims incapable of taking charge of their lives and of their community’s future.

THE ALTERNATIVE PATH: CAPACITY-FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT

Because of the negative consequences of a total reliance on the needs or deficit-based approach to community development, an alternative asset-based approach becomes imperative. That alternative path, very simply, leads toward the development of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills and assets of lower income people and their neighborhoods.

In addition to the problems associated with the dominant deficiency model, at least two more factors argue for shifting to a capacity-oriented emphasis. First, all of the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. This observation explains why communities are never built from the top

down, or from the outside in. (Clearly, however, valuable outside assistance can be provided to communities that are actively developing their own assets.)

The second reason for emphasizing the development of the internal assets of local urban neighborhoods is that the prospect for outside help is bleak indeed. Even in areas designated as Enterprise Zones, the odds are long that large-scale, job-providing industrial or service corporations will be locating in these neighborhoods. Nor is it likely in the light of continuing budget constraints, that significant new inputs of federal money will be forthcoming soon. It is increasingly futile to wait for significant help to arrive from outside the community. The hard truth is that development must start from within the community and, in most of our urban neighborhoods, there is no other choice.

Creative neighborhood leaders across the country have begun to recognize this hard truth, and have shifted their practices accordingly. They are discovering that wherever there are effective community development efforts, those efforts are based upon an understanding, or map, of the community’s assets, capacities and abilities. For it is clear that even the poorest neighborhood is a place where individuals and organizations represent resources upon which to rebuild. The key to neighborhood regeneration, then, is to locate all of the available local assets, to begin connecting them with one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes.

The entire process begins with the construction of a new “map,” a new mind set that focuses on community assets, rather than community needs. Once this guide to capacities has replaced the old one containing only needs and deficiencies, the regenerating community can begin to assemble its strengths into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production.

THE ASSETS OF A COMMUNITY: INDIVIDUALS, ASSOCIATIONS, INSTITUTIONS

Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community’s residents. Household by household, building by building, block by block, the capacity mapmakers will discover a vast and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills, few of which are being mobilized for community-building purposes. This basic truth about the “giftedness” of every individual is particularly important to apply to persons who often find themselves marginalized by communities. It is essential to recognize the capacities, for example, of those who have been labeled mentally handicapped or disabled, or of those who are marginalized because they are too old, or too young, or too poor. In a community whose assets are being fully recognized and mobilized, these people too will be part of the action, not as clients or recipients of aid, but as full contributors to the community-building process. In addition to map-

ping the gifts and skills of individuals, and of households and families, the committed community builder will compile an inventory of citizens’ associations. These associations, less formal and much less dependent upon paid staff than are formal institutions, are the vehicles through which citizens in the U.S. assemble to solve problems, or to share common interests and activities. It is usually the case that the depth and extent of associational life in any community is vastly underestimated. This is particularly true of lower income communities. In fact, however, though some parts of associational life may have dwindled in very low-income neighborhoods, most communities continue to harbor significant numbers of associations with religious, cultural, athletic, recreational and other purposes. Community builders soon recognize that these groups are indispensable tools for development, and that many of them can in fact be stretched beyond their original purposes and intentions to become full contributors to the development process.

Beyond the individuals and local associations that make up the asset base of communities are all of the more formal institutions, which are located in the community. Private businesses; public institutions such as schools, libraries, parks, police and fire stations; non-profit institutions such as hospitals and social service agencies—these organizations make up the most visible and formal part of a community’s fabric. Accounting for them in full, and enlisting them in the process of community development, is essential to the success of the process. For community builders, the process of mapping the institutional assets of

Module Two • Introduction

the community will often be much simpler than that of making an inventory involving individuals and associations. But establishing within each institution a sense of responsibility for the health of the local community, along with mechanisms that allow communities to influence and even control some

aspects of the institution's relationships with its local neighborhood, can prove much more difficult. Nevertheless, a community that has located and mobilized its entire base of assets will clearly feature heavily involved and invested local institutions.

Individuals, associations, and institutions—these three major categories contain within them much of the asset base of every community. Module Two focuses on helping participants shift from a needs mindset to an asset mindset and introduces them to the tools of identifying or “mapping” the assets in their community.

LeadershipPlenty Group Profile

Family Experiences

Neighborhood Involvement

Roles Played in Religious, PTO, and Civic Organizations

Understanding Different Cultures

Job Experiences

Education: In and Out of School

Major Accomplishments

Newspaper Article Discussion Questions

On the flip chart, list some examples of negative language used to describe the community and the situation. Then use the following questions to guide your discussion:

1

From whose perspective is the article written?

2

What are some assumptions being made about this community?

3

Based on the article, what is your impression of this community?

4

Do you think this is realistic?

5

How could it have been stated differently?

Scavenger Hunt Resource Cards

You are on the planning committee for a new community initiative to study urban sprawl. Who can you look to for help?

You are a county commissioner who is concerned about the rise in cycling accidents. Who can you look to for help?

You are on the school board, which is facing an increasing demand for Standards of Learning Testing. Who can you look to for help?

The empty lot across the street from your house is an eyesore. Who can you look to for help?

Your elderly mother has recently moved in with you and is in the house alone all day. Who can you look to for help?

Your church wants to offer health education and doesn't know where to begin. Who can you look to for help?

You are *(fill in the blank)*

Who can you look to for help?

You are *(fill in the blank)*

Who can you look to for help?
