

# Developing Community Connections with Asset Mapping

## ASSET MAPPING WITH CONNECTORS

Asset Mapping with Connectors is Step 2 in an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) process that helps people connect their strengths to create new opportunities for living well where periodic wildland fires are expected. (See the Series Overview for an introduction to the whole process.) During the first step, Situation Assessment, you will have started to learn about the community's strengths that support fire adaptation, as well as its challenges. By learning about these directly from community members, you probably met people who are "connectors." Invite them to collaborate with you on identifying the community's fire adaptation strengths more comprehensively in a "mapping" project.

### Identifying Connectors in Your Community

Connectors should be people who are interested, and perhaps experienced, in some aspect of wildland fire preparedness, response or recovery. But they need not be professional experts or recognized leaders. Connectors may be a retired Forest Service archeologist, someone from a small college, a mental health counselor, a chef, the owner of a small farm, and so on. Shared interest in fire may bring them together, but their social smarts make them successful at mobilizing the community's fire-related assets.

### Types of Asset Maps

A community's asset map shows its self-identified strengths. Many are not literal maps. Here are some ideas:

*A community asset inventory* is simple and easy. In a spreadsheet or similar document, it categorizes entries by asset type or geographic area. Entries are names, contact information, and brief notes—appropriately public information only. Think about adding a category for non-local contacts, such as university cooperative extension staff, a revered elder or a biochar specialist.

*Neighborhood asset maps* are geographic maps that locate fire-related assets in a neighborhood or commercial area. If it is a paper map—hand-drawn or marked on a printed map—creating it as a group or inviting people to add assets to a map at a fair can be fun and educational. It is also an effective way for people to share their local knowledge, whether assets or challenges. Like all community asset maps, it should be a public work-in-progress.

*Digital community asset maps* rely on mapping apps. They can be shared widely across numerous devices. Convenient and technically sophisticated, they interface well with business practices and reporting responsibilities. However, if it is the primary community asset map, creating and

**A community connector is** ▶ inclusive, open-minded, an interested and careful listener ▶ perceptive of individuals' strengths, what they care about and where their contributions to the community will be valued ▶ known, trusted and well-respected by many in the community ▶ happy when working collaboratively to improve community well-being

maintaining a digital map can be more like providing a service and less like the community-led and relationship-driven activity that sustains community resilience.

*Individual asset maps* help people discover each other's gifts of "head, hands, and heart." In pairs, have people draw a simple human body outline and record their partner's knowledge assets at the head, what they can do or make at the hands, and their social/emotional assets at the heart. Any individual gift, talent, or learned skill can be helpful for fire-adaptation activity—cooking (for fundraiser support, disaster recovery), art (prescribed fire signs, emotional processing), or empathy with others (everything!) are assets as much as tree identification, incident command system experience or physical strength.

### The Process

Invite the connectors together in a comfortable, informal environment—a restaurant or library, or at a kitchen table. Tell each other stories about what you care about related to fire, and why. The community's problems and opportunities will naturally arise. Facilitate the conversation by writing down all assets, the individuals, groups and organizations that are mentioned positively.

Ask the connectors to collaborate with their acquaintances to identify more of the community's fire-adaptive assets. Reconvene on a schedule that works for everyone to share what you are finding and the ideas that are emerging.

Capture the assets simply and easily on a community asset map or inventory; ensure that it is shared with everyone who participates and is updated frequently.

Enjoy! As people recognize their community's strengths, project ideas will flow. Focus on enabling the creativity that occurs, rather than limiting the scope of imagination to existing programs or plans. The connectors will work within the community to devise opportunities for people and organizations to contribute what they do best. Down the road, the experienced fire practitioners located through asset-mapping will help ensure that more ambitious projects are safe and consistent with best practices.

## Asset Mapping with Connectors: Step 2 in the Asset-Based Development Process for Helping Communities Adapt to Fire

### Community Assets to Map

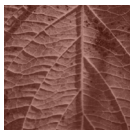
- ▶ People interested in or experienced with fire who have gifts, talents and skills related to community-led action
- ▶ Informal groups and clubs that support or could support community-led activity for advancing fire adaptation
- ▶ Formal institutions—such as businesses, agencies, churches, schools—that have supported wildland fire preparedness or recovery, or would like to
- ▶ Historic and cultural assets to protect, such as landmarks, graveyards and other places special to community members
- ▶ Resources for wildland fire response, such as evacuation routes, fuel breaks and water sources
- ▶ What other local assets would you like to note?

While there are no firm rules for how to engage with communities, here are some tips for successful community asset mapping:



#### Think big!

But start small and go slow. Create activities that are consistent with participants' available time and pace. Start with low-demand activities, have fun, and build on your success.



#### Lay the groundwork.

Find true community connectors rather than settling for representative stakeholders. Connectors are people who want to learn what their neighbors are good at and what they would like to contribute to community life.



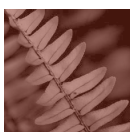
#### Don't let the map become The Product.

The purpose—and power—of community asset mapping is in the relationships formed while listening to and talking with fellow community members about their stories, their strengths and their existing resources. The map merely supports this ground truth.



#### Stay focused on assets.

If you find yourself focusing too much on what the community lacks, get back on track with two simple questions: "What do we have to work with?" and "What can we do with what we have?"



#### Be inclusive.

Sometimes the desire to *do something now* overrides a group's intention to be inclusive. But community resilience results from building enduring, trusting relationships among individuals, groups and organizations that share the same fire future.

The next installment in this series, "Facilitating Local Visioning and Identifying Action Steps," outlines how to work inclusively in a community to facilitate community-led actions that support fire adaptation.

This is part of a series of guides that will familiarize FAC practitioners with the hows and whys of the community-led asset mapping process. Together they lay out some best practices and lessons learned by communities as they use this process to become better adapted to fire.

Read the overview of the process: [bit.ly/ABCD\\_Overview](http://bit.ly/ABCD_Overview)

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The Fire Learning Network and Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network are part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information about PERFACT, contact Marek Smith: [marek\\_smith@tnc.org](mailto:marek_smith@tnc.org) or (919) 794-4374.  
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