Knowledge Synthesis

CREATING AN INVENTORY OF COMMUNITY ASSSETS

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INTRODUCTION

This knowledge synthesis is part of The Monieson Centre's Knowledge Impact in Society (KIS) Project, a three-year endeavour to connect academic knowledge with economic development needs in Eastern Ontario. The synthesis is an accessible presentation of the latest research on issues affecting rural Eastern Ontario. The knowledge synthesis topics were determined through information gathered at 15 community workshops run in partnership with the Eastern Ontario Community Futures Development Corporation network. The KIS Project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For more information, visit www.easternontarioknowledge.ca.

For community development efforts to be effective, community leaders must know what resources are available to them. In other words, leaders would benefit from having a comprehensive and up-to-date inventory of community assets. These assets include capacities of individuals, institutions and organizations, and physical resources.[1] The process of generating an asset inventory has several commonly-used names including asset mapping, mapping community capacity, and identifying community assets.

The creation of an asset inventory is of great value for a number of reasons. First, it presents community leaders with a broad and inclusive array of resources; this allows leaders to choose community development strategies that are in accordance with their asset base. Secondly, an asset inventory illuminates the gaps, needs, and inefficiencies in the region and helps community leaders to reallocate resources to key challenge areas and avoid unnecessary expenditures. As such, the creation of an inventory of community assets is undoubtedly a worthwhile goal.

THE PROCESS OF CREATING AN ASSET INVENTORY

Asset identification consists of identifying, categorizing, and cataloging all of the major assets that are relevant to economic development. Also recorded is relevant information pertaining to these assets. For example, a college that exists in the community is considered an asset; in addition, to recording the name of the school, the names of the key administrators and contact information would also be documented. In the end, this process will create a website (which acts as a database) that lists the assets

[1] John McKnight and John Kretzmann, "Mapping Community Capacity," The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, 1996, http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/papers/mcc.pdf (Accessed May 6, 2009)

and asset-related information that can be used to improve the decision-making of community leaders, and ultimately, the quality of community life. [2] For an asset inventory to be most useful, it should be made available online to community members (See Appendix A for links to existing asset inventories of communities in Canada).

In the following sections, the process of creating an asset inventory will be outlined.

Step 1: Assigning a Leader and Assembling the Project Team

Creating an asset inventory is no small undertaking and requires both human and financial resources. Community leaders must first appoint an individual in the community who will spearhead and manage the project. This leader must not only be responsible for creating an *initial* asset inventory, but he or she must also ensure that the asset inventory is updated on a frequent basis. In small rural communities, it may only be feasible to hire a single individual who undertakes the entire initiative. However, in communities where there are more financial resources, more people could be hired to work together in a team.

Ideally, the project team would include people from the private, academic, public, and non-profit sectors, as well as individuals with knowledge of the workforce, educational, and economic development institutions in the region.[3] At the very least, some of these individuals may be able to volunteer some time to help with identifying community assets. Also, the team should include an individual with strong research and analytical skills to gather information from various sources. Last, the team will need someone who is proficient at creating and managing a database where all the information will be stored and updated over time.

Step 2: Categorizing Community Assets – What Gets Recorded?

Broadly speaking, a community asset can be defined as *anything or anyone that can be used to improve the quality of community life*.[4] More specifically, assets include the human, intellectual, financial, physical and institutional capital in a community. According to researchers, the asset base includes criteria for corporate location decisions such as the availability of skilled labour, the quality of transportation infrastructure, the cost of doing business and proximity to customers. Assets also include other factors that are important to innovation such as research and development investment, technology transfer, and entrepreneurship support programs.[5]

The major types of assets (with examples) that should be recorded are as follows:

- Individual capacities (e.g., information about community leaders)
- Human capital (e.g., primary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions)

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[2] Bill Berkowitz and Eric Wadud, "Identifying Community Assets and Resources," The Community Tool Box, 2009, http://ctb.ku.edu/tools//sub_section_main_1043.htm (Accessed April 30, 2009)

[3] "Asset Mapping Roadmap: A Guide to Assessing Regional Development Resources," The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Association, 2005, http://www.careeronestop.org/RED/Illuminate_regional_Aug2007.pdf (Accessed April 30, 2009)

[4] Berkowitz, "Identifying Community Assets and Resources."

[5] "Asset Mapping Roadmap."

- Research and development institutions (e.g., research centres and business incubators)
- Financial capital (e.g., venture capital firms)
- Industrial base (e.g., major employers)
- Connective organizations (e.g., business and economic development organizations)
- Legal and regulatory environment (e.g., local government)
- Physical infrastructure (e.g., natural resources)
- Quality of life (e.g., recreational facilities)

Under each "type" of asset, important information needs to be recorded. For instance, under "Industrial Base", the following information about major employers needs to be recorded:

- List of largest employers in the region
- Names, location, and contact information for officers
- Applicable industrial codes
- Number of employees
- Product and service offerings

For a detailed listing of what data gets recorded with respect to each type of asset, please refer to Appendix B. This is a model template that should be adapted for use by the asset-inventory project team.

Step 3: Gathering Information about Assets

Information from Team Members
As a starting point, it is best to record information about assets that members of the team already know. If team members come from a wide variety of functional backgrounds, they will be able to provide a great deal of information about the resources in the community. This will serve as a base level of information for the database.

Online Resources
The majority of the information that is needed to create an asset inventory can often be found online. The use of the Internet should be the primary method that members of the project team use to gather information. Search engines like Google and databases are powerful tools. The yellow pages online (www.yellowpages.ca) can quickly provide a listing of businesses according to business type. Databases such as Proquest (www.proquest.com/en-US) contain news articles, journal publications, and government reports that can provide important demographic and statistical information. Additional databases can be used if project team members can get access to University library resources (www.library.queensu.ca/research/databases). The Internet also contains the names and contact information of individuals who may be able to provide additional information about community assets.

Email and Telephone Correspondence
After getting contact information of individuals who can help to provide information, project team members should correspond with them either by email or telephone. Project team members should develop a protocol for soliciting information from individuals. This way, communications can be professional, which will make it more likely for information to be transferred.

Surveys

In order to get detailed information from community leaders about themselves (See "Individual Capacities" in the previous section), it is necessary to go beyond making phone calls and sending emails. To record individual characteristics, researchers have come up with a variety of survey instruments (Individual Capacity Inventories).[6] While these instruments vary considerably, they essentially all ask respondents to provide their name, contact information, skills and abilities, interests, entrepreneurial activities, and their affiliation in various community groups.

To create a survey, project team members can use a popular and effective online survey creation tool called Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). This tool allows team members to create professional surveys at a low cost. When the survey is created, community leaders can be invited to fill out surveys online. When the data is collected, the survey tool presents the data in a user-friendly format so that the information can be easily transferred to a database. In the end, this process should create a consolidated list or directory of a sample of community leaders that contains important information about their skills, abilities, interests, and background. It should be noted that it is impossible to gather data from every single community leader. The best that can be done is to target community leaders from each of the key sectors of the community (i.e. Academia, Business, Non-Profit, Health-care, Skilled Trades, Government). The goal is to develop a representative sample of the different types of leaders in the community.

Step 4: Building the Inventory and Keeping it Up-to-date

The ultimate goal in creating an inventory of community assets is for this inventory to be online on a website for the members of the community to access. This way, community members can easily use this resource to make more well-informed decisions. As such, after gathering the information about assets, a website needs to be built and all the information needs to be entered on this site. To do this, a web programmer needs to be hired.

The inventory also needs to be kept up-to-date. The team must decide how frequently they want to update the inventory. This decision should be based on the resources that are available to the team. Ideally, the inventory should be updated at least once a year. This requires the team to collaborate periodically and repeat the information gathering process. For instance, new businesses, organizations, and institutions that have located in the area need to be recorded. By maintaining the inventory of community assets, community members will have a valuable resource to use for years to come.

[6] Lionel Beaulieu, "Mapping the Assets of your Community: A Key Component for Building Local Capacity," The Southern Rural Development Center, 2002, http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227_asset_mapping.pdf (Accessed May 6, 2009)

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

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APPENDIX A – INVENTORY OF COMMUNITY ASSETS POSTED ONLINE

Penticton, British Columbia
http://www.footprintstotechnology.com/docs/CommunitY_INVENTORY-OF-ASSET07.pdf

Bamfield, British Columbia
http://www.bamfield.ca/images/Community%20Asset%20Inventory%20September%202005%20JD.pdf

Kapuskasing, Ontario
(News Release regarding a new Asset Mapping Project, March 2009)
http://www.news.ontario.ca/mndm/en/2009/03/kapuskasing-to-market-community-assets.html

Southslave Region, North-West Territories
http://www.sshcp.nt.ca

Missoula, Montana
http://dma.mt.gov/des/Library/2007_PDM_Plan_Update/Documents/District_1_PDMs/Missoula/Section_3.pdf

APPENDIX B – DETAILED ASSET INVENTORY CATEGORIES[7]

The following list outlines the type of information that should be collected for each asset inventory category.

Individual Capacities

- Community Leaders
  - Personal Information
  - Community Skills
  - Enterprising Interests
  - Affiliation in various community groups

Human Capital (Including K-12 and Higher Educational Institutions)

- K–12 Education Systems
  - Number, names and location of school districts
  - Names and contact info of school district leaders
  - Number, names and location of schools
  - Names and contact information of principals
  - Number of students (including English as second language students)
  - Special programs, such as internships and advanced placement for high school students
  - Articulation agreements with community colleges
- Community Colleges
  - Number, names and locations
  - Names and contact information of officers
  - Number of students, with breakdown by relevant categories (such as full/part time)
  - List of academic areas/programs relevant to regional initiatives (with enrollments)
  - List of specialized programs and faculty
  - Collaborations with business community and with regional K-12 schools
  - Number of annual graduates
- Four-year Colleges and Universities
  - Names and locations of each institution
  - Names and contact information of relevant officials, such as president, deans, etc.
  - Total enrollments and enrollments in undergraduate and graduate degree programs relevant to regional economic initiatives
  - List of specialized programs and faculty
  - List of Professional Science Master Degree programs at regional institutions
  - List of special purpose facilities
  - List of relevant research programs
  - Collaborations with regional business community and other institutions that support regional growth
  - Number of international students and programs

[7] Asset Mapping Roadmap: A Guide to Assessing Regional Development Resources," The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Association, 2005, http://www.careeronestop.org/RED/Illuminate_regional_Aug2007.pdf (Accessed April 30, 2009)

  - Number of online courses offered
- Private/Non-Profit Technical Schools and Institutes
  - Names, location and contact info for relevant officials
  - Areas of specialization
  - List of programs
  - Affiliations with other area institutions
  - Eligibility requirements
  - Total enrollment and enrollment in relevant programs
- Continuing and Professional Education Providers
  - Names, location and contact information for relevant officials
  - Nature of institution (e.g. four-year College)
  - List of certificates and programs offered
  - Affiliations with other regional institutions
- Available Workforce
  - Breakdown of regional population by age groups, including number of adults over 18 years of age
  - Location of population within region
  - Breakdown of regional population by income levels
  - Breakdown of regional population by occupation
  - Breakdown of regional population by degree and/or educational attainment
- Specialized Workforce
  - Number of skilled workers in areas of employment relevant to innovation-based economy
  - Future skill needs for industries that are growing or targeted for growth
- Workforce System
  - Names and locations of workforce one-stop service centers
  - Names of programs/services offered by government agencies
  - Non-profit organizations offering programs in, or making investments in, workforce development
  - Private sector programs for workforce development
  - Remediation programs for displaced workers
  - Career advancement programs for incumbent workers

Research and Development

- Research Centres
  - Name, address and contact information
  - Type of institution (public, private, academic, mixed)
  - Names and contact information for officers
  - Areas of research focus
  - Names, addresses and contact information for high-performance computing centers in the region
  - Identification of institutions with high performance computing capabilities
- Business Incubators
  - Name, address and contact information
  - Mission and any specialized focus of incubator

  - Names of companies located in incubator, with contact information and area of focus for each
- Research Parks
  - Name, address and contact information
  - Available space for lease or building
  - Specialized focus of research, if any
- Corporate Research and Development
  - Names, addresses and contact information for companies with significant R&D activities
  - Areas of R&D activities
  - Relationships with other regional institutions
  - Overall budget

Financial Capital

- Venture Capital (VC) Firms
  - Names and locations of firms and contact information for principals
  - Size (amount of capital under management) of existing firms
  - Targeted sectors of firms
- Angel Investors/Networks
  - Names and contact information for individual/network principal
  - Size (amount of capital under management) of existing angel groups
  - Targeted sectors of investors/networks
  - Names and contact numbers for attorneys, accountants and other support professionals with relevant expertise
- Commercial Banks
  - Names and locations of bank regional headquarters and contact information
  - Names of bank presidents
  - Special investment programs
- Philanthropic Foundations (national and regional)
  - Name, addresses and primary points of contact for staff and boards
  - Background/history
  - Geographic focus and limitations on giving
  - Fields of interest
  - Lists of grantees in recent years
- Government Programs
  - Loan programs

Industrial Base

- Major Employers
  - List of largest employers in region
  - Names, location, and contact information for officers
  - Applicable industrial codes
  - Number of employees
  - Product and service offerings
- Clusters
  - List of regional clusters
  - Number of firms in clusters

- Number of employees in clusters
- Cluster support structure
- Small Business/Entrepreneurship
  - List of successful entrepreneurial firms
  - Names and locations of entrepreneurship and small business support centers/programs
  - List of supporting professional firms, including lawyers, accountants, marketing firms, etc.

Connective Organizations

- Business and Economic Development Organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce)
  - Names of organizations and contact information for professional and volunteer officials
  - Names of member organizations
  - Major program areas
- Business/Education Partnerships
  - Names of partnerships and contact information for leaders
  - Mission of partnership
  - Major program areas
- Industry/Cluster Associations
  - Names and contact information for officials
  - Names and contact information for member organizations
  - Major program areas

Legal and Regulatory Environments

- Taxes
  - Federal, state, local, and regional tax rates potentially impacting regional businesses
  - Available tax credits/tax incentive programs
- Wage structure
  - Breakdown of region's skilled worker categories
- Utilities
  - Names, contact information and service areas for major suppliers of water, gas and electricity
- Local government
  - Names and contact information for local officeholders
  - Nature of relationship to/jurisdiction over regional assets
  - Key development-related programs
- Provincial Government
  - Names and contact information for provincial officeholders
  - Nature of relationship to/jurisdiction over regional assets
  - Key development-related programs
- Federal Government
  - Names and contact information for elected officials representing region
  - Names and contact information for relevant federal officials in regional offices
  - Nature of relationship to/jurisdiction over regional assets
  - Key development-related programs
- Legislation/Laws
  - Pending legislation impacting on assets of/plans for the region

- Existing statutes/regulations, on state/local/regional levels, that provide or prevent competitive advantage over other regions and/or support other regional assets

Physical Infrastructure

- Airports
    - Names and locations of regional airports
    - Number of carriers
    - Number of flights
    - Destination cities
    - Cargo handling capacity
- Highways
    - Names of major highways
    - Miles of interstate roads
    - Number of interstate interchanges
- Rail and Trucking
    - List of regional and interstate passenger services
    - List of regional and interstate cargo services
    - Location of intermodal facilities
    - Names and contact information for interstate trucking firms with operations in region
- Maritime
    - Names of port facilities and contact information for officers
    - Names of shipping lines using facility
    - Nature of cargo handled
- Communications
    - Names and contact information for telecommunication providers in region
    - Natural resources
    - Available water supply and infrastructure for delivery
    - Available resources to support business clusters and infrastructure for delivery
- Real Estate
    - Available land for building
    - Available buildings for occupancy
    - Projects online
    - Available single family and multi-family dwellings for purchase or rental
- Industrial/Business Parks
    - Names, locations and contact information for management
    - Special features
- Mass Media Channels
    - List of mass media channels (e.g., television, radio, and newspaper) and contact information

Quality of Life

- Amenities and Population Flow
    - Parks and recreational facilities
    - Cultural attractions and institutions (museums, theater, music, etc)
    - Inflow/outflow of residents, by age and education