

LESSON 1

Asset-Based Community Development and Early Organization

In this lesson, you will learn how to recognize and use all of your available resources in the planning and development of your community garden. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a framework for organizing of any kind – not just for gardens – that emphasizes the strengths and assets of a community and its members and makes the most of these assets for the particular development project. In 1993 Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight created this model as an outgrowth of their research that found that groups and communities who had effectively mobilized and built capacity shared these key elements:

- citizen vs. client orientation
- focus on strengths
- power from relationships
- building on opportunities
- integration of community economic development principles

Using the ABCD approach fosters a positive environment for the creation of a community garden because it helps participants focus on the positive aspects of their community and their project, rather than the negatives. In this lesson you will learn how to identify your community assets, and learn the early steps for recruiting and organizing a core garden team. Early recruiting and organizing is included in this lesson on ABCD because the two go hand-in-hand: your core organizers are some of your assets, and they will help identify more assets.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the basics of Asset-Based Community Development and how to use this approach.
2. Practice mapping community assets.
3. Know strategies for initial group organizing and recruitment.

Understanding Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

ABCD promotes a “glass-half-full” mindset for the community garden creation process. The guiding question of the ABCD approach is “What existing resources and skills are available to us in our local community?” This approach puts a positive spin on the “needs-based” approach to community development, in which a group would seek to identify solutions to a particular problem in their community. It can sometimes be challenging to use the “needs-based” approach and still maintain positivity in community brainstorming sessions, since the focus is on a problem. In any planning process, it is important to keep the conversation positive and promote pride in the local community, and ABCD can help you do that. ABCD helps your group focus on what resources you have available and what positive things you can accomplish with those resources.

The following description from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University provides a vivid description of ABCD:



"How you perceive the neighborhood that you live or work in is going to profoundly influence the way that you act. Typically a neighborhood is seen from the perspective of its largest deficits. 'That is a dangerous neighborhood,' 'That neighborhood looks trashy,' 'There is a lot of poverty in that community.' How many times have you heard that as a first description of a neighborhood? We all know about the negative things that are a part of our community, but, at the other side of every deficit, is an asset begging for some attention. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is intentional about keeping our focus on those assets and celebrating what is right with our community. You will notice that as people begin to talk about the positive things in the community, when they are encouraged to talk about what is working, when they learn of all the great resources that are in their neighborhood (and in some cases have always been available in their neighborhood), the energy level will increase exponentially."

— INRC Organizers Workbook



Below are three concise characteristics of ABCD and five types of assets that you might find in your community (both adapted from the Toronto Community Garden Network's "Community Garden Handbook") to help you visualize the ABCD approach.

Three Primary Characteristics of ABCD

1. **Asset-based** – Garden planning is based around individual contributions, associations, local institutions and the local ecology and economy of a neighborhood.
2. **Internally focused** – Development strategies focus on the interests and problem-solving capabilities of local residents, local associations and local institutions.
3. **Relationship-driven** – This approach promotes the development of relationships between residents, local associations and local institutions by constantly asking whether actions will positively contribute to stronger relationships.

Five Categories of Assets

16

The following are the types of assets you might find in your community. When you are brainstorming possible assets, make sure to think about all of these categories. Below you'll find an example of an "assets map" that uses these categories of assets, contrasted with a needs map to reinforce the difference in visualizing your community. In the next section of this lesson, you'll learn how to build a more specific type of assets map that is focused on your community in particular.

1. **Individual Contributions** – The specific talents, skills, and resources that community members possess that can be put to work in building the community. (Examples: gardening experience, people-organizing skills, computer skills, construction skills, musical talents, monetary donations, materials donations, etc.)
2. **Associations** – Small formal or informal groups of people that work together towards a common goal (including shared interests). An association helps to amplify or build upon the gifts, talents and skills of individual community members. (Examples: resident's associations, book clubs, sports teams, faith groups)
3. **Institutions** – Local government, businesses and community organizations that have resources and knowledge that can be drawn upon to support community building.

4. **Land and Buildings** – Infrastructure and space resources in a neighborhood, such as a school or community center open to community groups after hours for meeting space, open space for the garden, parks for meetings and celebrations, etc.
5. **The Local Economy** – Local businesses and lending organizations that can donate money or materials, and/or publicize and support community work. (Examples: printing shops that can do free copies of posters, local newspapers that publish stories on community projects, garden centers that donate plants, etc.)

Mapping Community Assets

In this activity you will practice identifying the potential partners and assets available to you when planning your community garden. All communities are different; therefore, it is recommended that you conduct this activity with your own community garden group early in the planning stages. The goal is to brainstorm all the assets available from the different groups, people, and organizations involved in the garden, using the five categories of assets as a guide, and the benefits those respective entities can gain from involvement in the garden. You should do this early on to help guide your recruitment (see below), and then once again after you have established a larger core garden management group, to expand your reach into the community and its available assets.

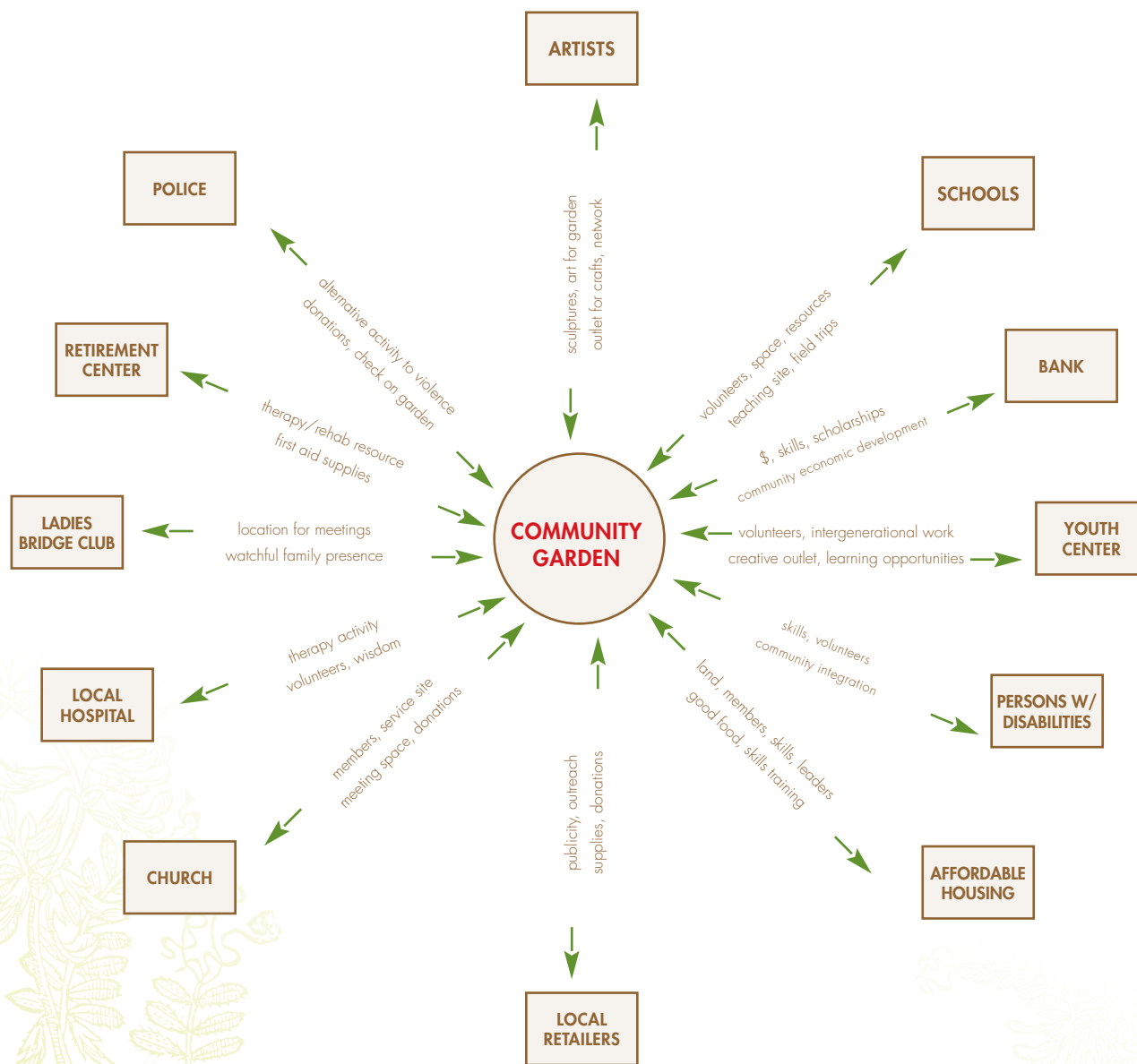


ACTIVITY 1

Community Asset Mapping (The following steps and example maps—Figures 1 and 2— are adapted from the Toronto Community Garden Network’s “Community Garden Handbook.”)

1. **On a large sheet, draw a circle in the middle and write “Community Garden Project,” or the appropriate name for your own project, inside.**
2. **On the outside edges of the paper write the names of partners or potential partners you can identify and draw a box around each of them. Think creatively about potential partners.**
3. **Brainstorm ways that each partner can help a community garden, again thinking creatively. For example, the police department could be a potential partner that might be willing to include the garden site on its neighborhood check route or to donate funds from the local police athletic league fund.**
4. **Draw an arrow from each partner to the garden circle and label each arrow with the ways that partner can contribute to the garden effort.**
5. **Brainstorm what the garden can offer each partner. For example, could act as a gang or violence prevention strategy by providing youth alternatives to boredom or illegal activities, which would benefit the local police department.**
6. **Draw an arrow from the garden to each potential partner, and label those arrows with the ways the garden can benefit the partners. The result is labeled arrows in both directions between each partner and the garden project.**

Mapping Reciprocal Partnerships



Mapping Reciprocal Partnerships

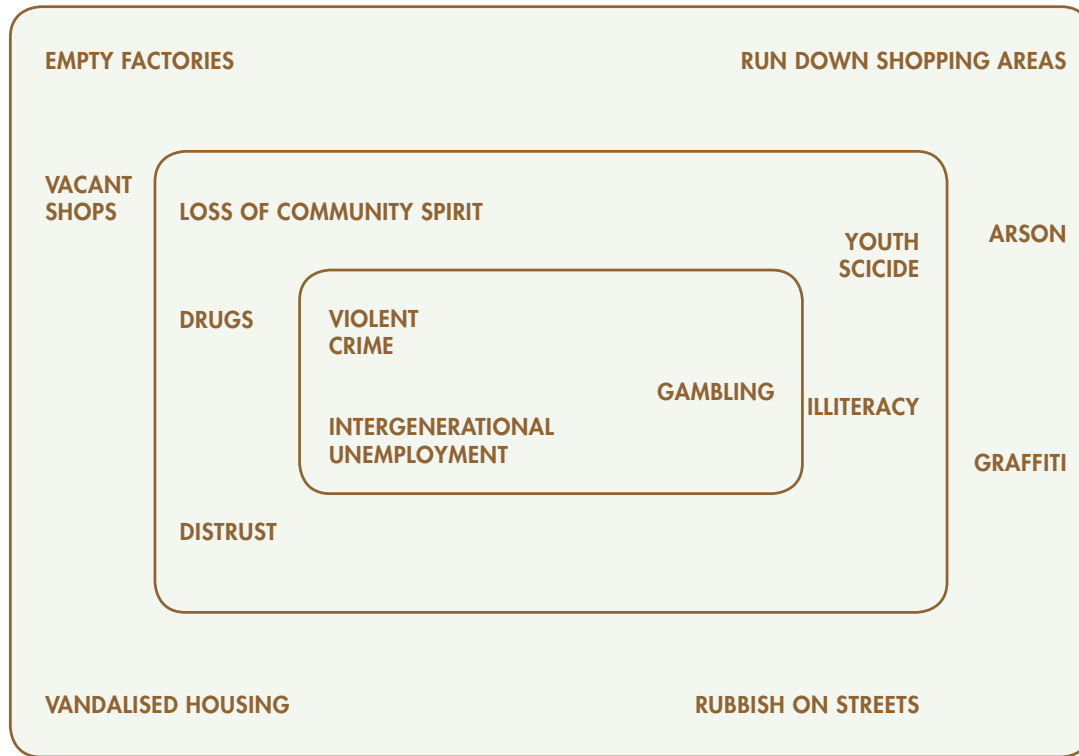


Figure 1: The "Needs Map" Adopted from Kretzmann & McKnight (1993, 3)

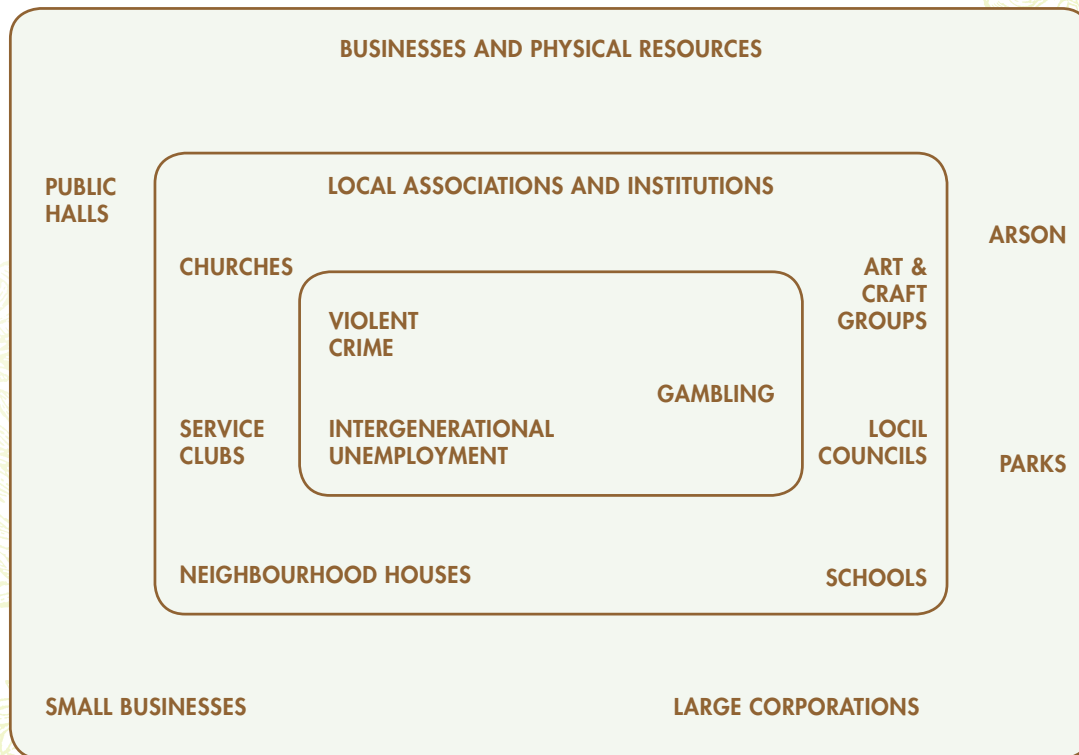


Figure 2: The "Assets Map" Adopted from Kretzmann & McKnight (1993, 7)





Early Organizing

Most likely you'll be starting your project with just a few people who want a garden, but to take advantage of the assets available to you and distribute tasks, you'll need to expand your core group early on. One option is to reach out to an established community group that is already linked to one of your core garden team members. This group might be a church group, a garden club, a neighborhood association, a Home Owners Association, a book club, etc. This takes advantage of existing relationships in which people have worked or socialized together. However, another option is to start your own group based on recruiting specifically for the community garden.

Members

If you're starting a new group or building on an existing one, think about trying to recruit people from the various spokes on your initial assets map. The benefits that you brainstormed can be used as talking points when you speak with potential recruits. Types of people and groups that you should recruit might include:

1. **Neighbors:** Most likely whoever is starting the garden will be a resident of the community; neighbors will be the people using the garden most.
2. **A city or county representative:** A stakeholder such as a representative from the parks and recreation department, development services or from a local planning group can help with leasing public land, explain building code regulations, etc.
3. **Gardening experts:** Master Gardeners, other nonprofit gardening groups, local farmers who might donate knowledge, materials, or labor.
4. **Local business owners/managers:** These people may have materials or funds to donate; look into local hardware stores, garden stores, restaurants, etc.
5. **Community group representatives:** People who belong to the local PTA, churches, housing association, etc.
6. **Teachers, school administrators, and/or school district representatives:** These people will be able to help with recruiting interested gardening families; in the next lesson we discuss the option of joint use gardens that link schools and communities, which will require close contact with a school.
7. **Land owner or representative of the land owner:** If it is city-owned land, this might be a parks representative who can help you deal with land use regulations and advocate for the garden.

Steps to Take

The following is an example of the very first steps to take to get the community garden project under way.

1. **Each initial organizer** (this may just be you and a friend!) brainstorms all the people he or she knows in the community who may have interest in joining the effort.
2. **Make personal contact** (phone or in-person is best) with each of these potential collaborators to discuss the project and the mutual benefits if they join, assess their interest and availability, and draw on their contacts for other possible recruits. A personal contact and request can greatly increase the chance of someone choosing to participate. Questions to ask in this conversation:
 - a. What benefits do you see for yourself/your family/your business/the community from a community garden?
 - b. What kind of garden do you envision?
 - c. What skills might you be able to bring to the effort?
 - d. Would you be interested in joining the core group to manage the garden? If not, how would you like to be involved?
 - e. What is your availability for meetings?
 - f. Who else would you suggest we get in touch with?
3. **Schedule a kick-off meeting** at a time and place that will work for many people. Use your potential collaborators' stated availability and your sense of your expected attendees' availability to schedule the meeting.
4. **Create a clear agenda for the meeting.** It should at minimum include the following, and specify the allotted time for each scheduled item:
 - a. introductions of attendees
 - b. overview of the agenda and goals for the meeting
 - c. initial thoughts on the garden from the initial planners and any plans that have already been made
 - d. time for each attendee to state their goals for the garden
 - e. open discussion time
 - f. Next steps (spell out clear actions and goals for each interested participant that will be accomplished by a stated date; making expected actions clear and known to the whole group will increase action after the meeting)
 - g. schedule the next meeting
5. **Choose a meeting leader, note taker, and timekeeper** (doesn't have to be three different people if you are starting with a small group)
6. **Conduct the meeting as stated in the agenda,** and with open-mindedness toward new goals, assets, connections, and relationships.



References

1. INRC Organizers Workbook. Asset Based Community Development Institute.
Available www.inrc.org/resources/publications
2. Kretzmann, J. & J. McKnight. 1993.
"Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets."
"The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University,
Evanston, Illinois.
Available www.abcdinstitute.org/publications/basicmanual
3. Toronto Community Food Animators. 2008.
"How to Start a Community Garden Handbook."
Toronto Community Garden Network.
Available www.tcgn.ca/wiki/wiki.php?n=DonationsTradesSharing.CommunityGardensHandbook

