ASSET MAPPING
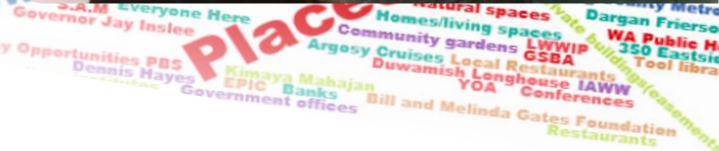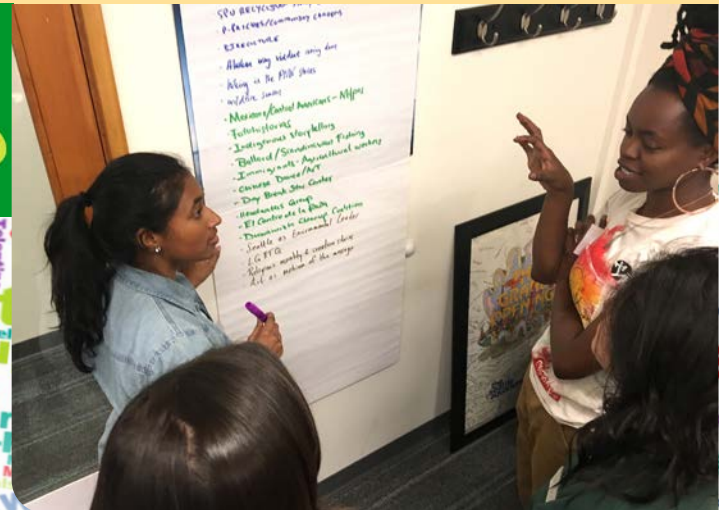
Story of Practice: Seattle Youth Climate Action Network (SYCAN)

Mapping Assets with Youth & Adults for Climate Action

WOODLAND PARK ZOO

Catalyzing community involves inviting and sharing control with an ever-widening circle of those most affected by an issue.

Asset mapping can be a powerful tool for welcoming community members, including those most often left out of problem-solving conversations, into the circle of action and contribution. The result is more effective, sustainable and broadly-owned change solutions.

The Seattle Youth Climate Action Network (SYCAN) team, facilitated by staff at the Seattle Woodland Zoo creatively utilized asset mapping to open the way for young people who had become active in the network to act more powerfully within the network as leaders, contributors and decision-makers.

The team's work with asset mapping exemplified key aspects of this process which are often forgotten in many traditional applications:
- including everyday residents (not just professionals) as contributors and owners,
- framing asset mapping in terms of actions participants might take,
- prioritizing follow-up to support ongoing action
- embracing asset mapping as a tool to guide relationship-building
- approaching asset mapping as an iterative process

BACKGROUND

In 2017, Seattle Youth Climate Action Network (SYCAN) received an IMLS grant to catalyze the network of climate-focused community partners to support youth climate literacy and climate action.

Part of this grant included mapping assets and resources amongst community partners to help design project activities that aligned with identified priorities. Staff completed this mapping process in early 2018 with adult community partners, but throughout that year, the focus of SYCAN shifted to youth-led climate action. This shift in focus necessitates another asset mapping process with

youth in the room both so they are aware of the resources and assets available to them, but also for them to include the assets in their own communities.

Additionally, as learned from the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, the consulting body for the IMLS grant we received, asset mapping is an iterative process that needs to be revisited and updated. Community partners also supported revisiting this process.

The original plan was to include only program staff and external youth and adult stakeholders in the process. However, the planning team realized that many zoo staff across many departments were addressing climate change through their work and could also be included in this climate-focused asset mapping.

The objectives of the process were as follows:

- SYCAN is strengthened by engaging internal zoo stakeholders focused on climate change in a more systematic exploration of the assets, resources, and partnerships available and needed to catalyze youth-led climate literacy and action.
- Internal zoo stakeholders contribute expertise and resources to SYCAN's structure and programming that reflect equity-based and inclusive goals, and are rooted in climate justice.
- These stakeholders join a network of adult and youth community partners building a network that supports youth climate literacy and action.

This internal asset mapping activity would take place over a 2-hour period, but would have far-reaching impacts both in SYCAN and throughout the zoo, including increased collaboration and sharing of resources, and climate action that is youth-led, community-supported, and supports the zoo's mission.

Asset mapping would take place on zoo grounds and would be facilitated by faculty from the ABCD Institute as an already-included site visit and expense within the IMLS grant. This would potentially include the following stakeholders: ZooCorps (teens and program staff), Wildlife Conservation, Sustainability Operations, Community Engagement, and Interpretative Engagement.

IN THEIR WORDS: SYCAN'S ASSET MAPPING EXPERIENCE

Below, lead SYCAN facilitator Danté DiSabatino shares how his team unlocked fresh, creative, community-led momentum through a thoughtfully designed asset mapping process, with the support of ABCD Institute consultant Ron Dwyer-Voss. (This was shared at a virtual gathering of IMLS Community Catalyst Cohort members on Feb. 20, 2020.)

I was part of a project that was a recipient of round one for the community catalyst initiative. And also I'll be presenting a little bit today about how we use asset mapping with climate action and youth involvement. I was a community liaison for Woodland Park Zoo and we were recipients of the IMLS grant for Cohort One. It was really exciting to be a part of that process.

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Danté DiSabatinor
Former Community Liaison,
Woodland Zoo

I'm really excited to talk about this tool of asset mapping. It was something that was, I would say, transformational for our project in Cohort One.

One of the things that we [SYCAN] were really trying to take initiative on doing was connecting this group of professionals, nonprofits, across a lot of different sectors and help connect their resources to students that wanted to take action on climate change. So these are some of the groups that were in the room.

SET-UP

It was interesting, in our project we had two communities. One community of these adults and people that were working in the sphere around climate action or had questions related to how to propel it. And then we had a group of students that we worked with much closely. Some of the key community connectors we have represented were a University of Washington climate impacts group, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks looking at climate action and justice. It was a really exciting opportunity.

Now, the pictures that you see here are actually from our first iteration of doing asset mapping with this group of folks. And our goal was to really figure out, "What can we do and what is possible to take action

on climate change?" So Ron actually helped us you'll see him in, in the orange on the left picture there helping us facilitate.

I want you to take a look at this photo and look at some of the things that brought people together.

One, we had food, we had a lot of food. Yes, we had a lot of food we actually created.

We used a community asset that was owned by Seattle aquarium to have this meeting space to start this conversation of what's possible. And this was the beginning of a second year of our project for students to get involved. So this was used as an event to get people excited, get people started, and to figure out what could be possible.

But we had a place, we had specific invitations that were sent, we had food. We brought other people on [through] the social media—we actually used zoom. And if you look on the television screen, we had people join that way.

So we made it a very accessible space and at a time that worked for people. And it was just a really exciting time.

What came out of this project was this word map. *We went through the room to figure out, "What could be possible to take action on climate change?"*

And there were a couple important things that made this happen.

- *One is that we helped frame the boundaries for how we're taking action on climate change within Seattle. We wanted to make sure it was around climate action. A lot of the times when people are writing things on the different boards around the room, it got really easy for folks to kind of go to the side and and talk about environmental issues maybe that weren't related to climate action. But we helped frame the boundary to climate action, which was really helpful.*

- *We had these two main groups of adults and students, so the age gap was pretty different. People were coming in from different angles, but we created a space that was equal and level. We had usually about two to three students for every smaller group of adults, so each group that was rotating, they were rotating together with the adults in the room and the students. It was a level playing field that was so important for us everyone had the gifts to offer.*

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The age gap was pretty different. People were coming in from different angles, but we created a space that was equal and level. We had usually about two to three students for every smaller group of adults . . . It was a level playing field that was so important for us, where everyone had the gifts to offer.

And we wanted to make sure that the students knew that they had a lot of assets, just like the adults in the room did too. This really helped harness our momentum.

Danté DiSabatino
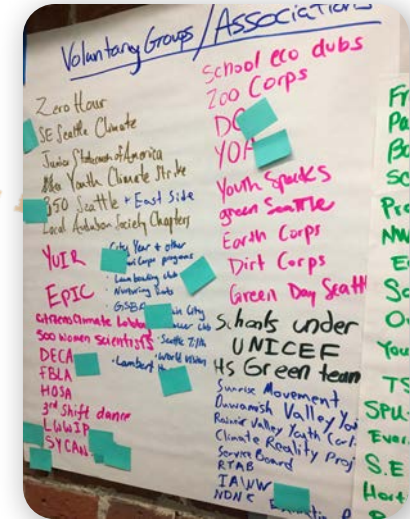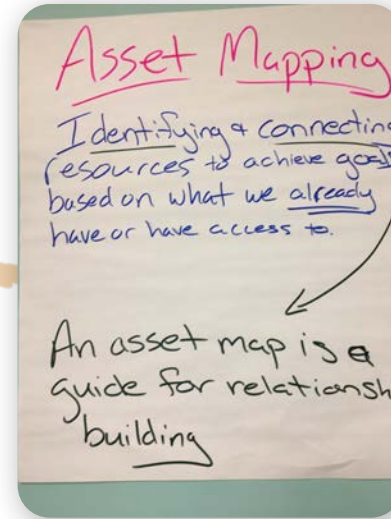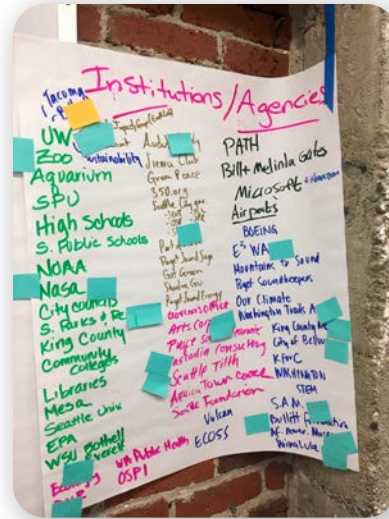
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It was really exciting to show these assets around institutions, agencies, cultural stories, associations and places and spaces. And the group got really excited.

I'm happy to share the typed-up list of all of these assets and organized from the adults and students that were in the room that came up with these ideas. [See list here]

IMAGINING POSSIBILITIES

So our question was, looking at all of these assets, there were so much potential, there were so much areas and names and associations and people that we can turn to the question that we asked is, "What is possible?"

Now, what was exciting about this is that it came out in three different areas from the group. The group came up and themselves figured out what were the common themes that came out of all these assets.

They saw that:

- *there is a huge interest in talking about climate change and climate justice with schools,*

- *that there's ways that we can amplify existing community efforts around climate change,*

- *and also that there was a lot of interest and assets in the gifts that people were bringing in the room and people that they knew in the community around climate change and art.*

And I'll talk a little bit more about how the asset mapping led to one of the major projects that we did, which was around climate change and art installations.

So with the timing that we had, the climate change and art group really formed into driving one of the major events. The students came up with a community climate art series. They immediately started reaching out to their friends pulling from the assets, looking at the places and spaces that they came up with, who did they need to contact and how would it be possible, and they came up with a multi community art series, which involved creating a mural and then having the community help create it that projected climate justice and climate art.
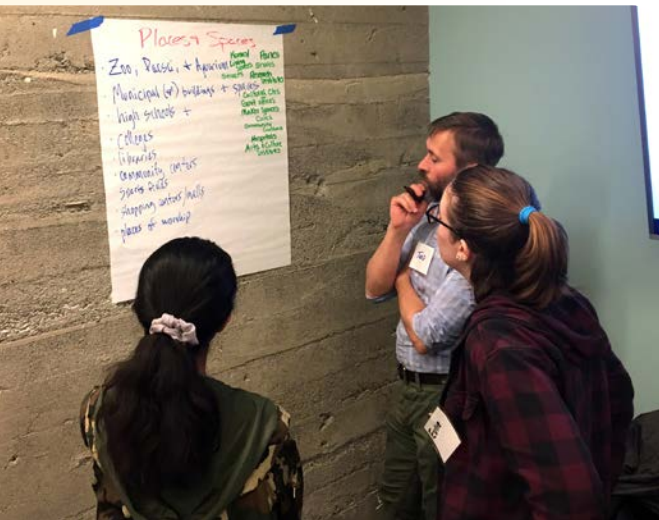
These are some pictures from one of the first events where they invited community members to come in to do a paint-by-number of a collaborative art piece that really showed pulling the curtain back on climate change and showing a possibility for a more resilient climate future.

Something that we noticed in this, like I mentioned, is that this asset mapping really set the precedent for harnessing momentum. And it came with the students realizing the power that they had in such a huge topic like climate change, but they actually had some power to take action.

Some of the most amazing things that happened out of this is that after these meetings happened, some of the students then identified their own smaller breakout groups. They created their own smaller, other communities where they collaborated with their friends immediately at the school. They reached out to their different local school clubs and groups. And then they created conversations that didn't exist before the asset mapping process.

LESSONS LEARNED

I do want to mention some of my biggest lessons learned from this process:

- ***Follow-up is extremely important.*** *Because this momentum was so powerful in the beginning, you want to make sure that you do follow up and you help give them the tools to continue that facilitation. Something that I wish that I did in my position was to help a little bit more with that follow up, because once the momentum is there, you want to make sure you keep on going with it with communication and facilitation with that group.*

- ***You want to consider timing of when this asset mapping happens.*** *Something that was a challenge for our group was figuring out times and places to meet. Just to give you a scope of where these students and these institutions and associates were located, we're talking about the whole city of Seattle. So the farthest distance between one student and another student could actually be 20 miles. So it was a large group, very widespread. So coming up with times and places to meet took a lot of energy to figure out, "Where do we do this asset mapping? And how do we tackle such a big topic?"*

But this was so helpful for us in kind of reaching a final point for catalyzing action.

COMMUNITY CLIMATE ART SERIES

Saturday, August 17
Woodland Park
3–6 pm

Wednesday, August 21
Jefferson Park
3–6 pm

Saturday, August 24
Cal Anderson Park
3–6 pm

Come join the Seattle Youth Climate Action Network to paint a mural that celebrates our community's efforts to combat climate change!

Things to Bring:
- Reusable water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Clothing that can be dirtied

Snacks and art supplies will be provided!

For specific park location details, please visit us at www.sycan.org

Email seattleyouthcan@zoo.org with any questions

*This asset mapping really set the precedent for harnessing momentum. And it came with the students realizing the power that they had, that in such a huge topic like climate change, **they actually had some power to take action.***

Danté DiSabatino

## MAPPING ASSETS INTERNALLY TO CATALYZE MOMENTUM

We actually used this tool internally as well at Woodland Park Zoo. [We asked,] "if our communities are doing so much action around this, how can we use this tool internally across our own departments to catalyze the momentum?"

So for Woodland Park Zoo, we had a lot of different folks from different levels, from a vice president level down to volunteer level for people to be involved in this process. So when we say SYCAN, that would be me and some other co-workers that were representing climate action interest around that. But we wanted to see, "How can we use this tool internally to kind of make our efforts for our communities stronger?"

These are some of the kind of things that we came up with:
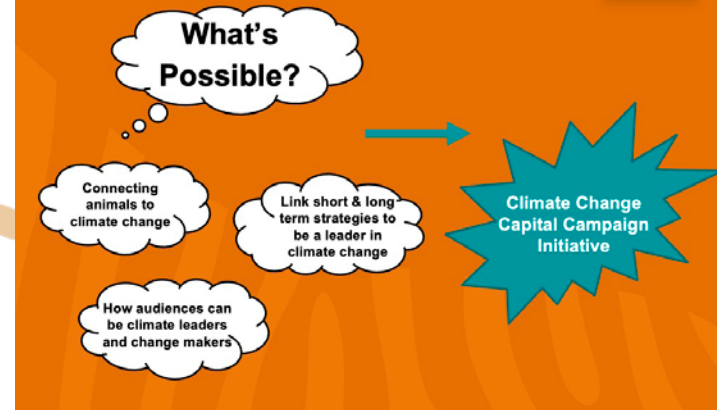
This word map was very helpful for us to see, "What we can do around climate action as an institution, and collaboration with our community? How can our institutional assets be leveraged also for the community that we were working with?"

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The products of this were actually also given with our community to show them some of the assets that maybe we have, that we came up with in the room that we can further connect them to as well.

We also figured out what would be possible around all of the assets that we came up with to show that we can connect our animals to climate change and our audience to climate change. And also, it can help us develop more of a strategy for how we can be engaging our communities better, to linking short and long term strategies around climate change and possibly be a leader.

A lot of this work actually helped develop a foundation for how we were able to develop our climate change capital campaign initiatives. So when we had huge fundraising goals as an institution, this actually helped catalyze momentum there as well.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS

I do want to stress some of the big major takeaways we had from this process.

1. **Number one, doing this with our community and also internally really helped us harness momentum around the topic.** *This is a great tool to use at the beginning of a project, to get people excited, to realize the potential that they have to take on large problems like climate change, and that there is a lot of possibility. A lot of students coming in wanted to do something, but the idea of climate change was scary. They're involved in this because of what they see portrayed in the media, what they're seeing with natural disasters and how people are being displaced. They wanted to take action, but being able to do that for them, in the beginning before this process, they just saw a lot of gap. This showed the opportunity of what they can do to move the needle.*

2. **Following up is extremely important when it comes to asset mapping,** *and considering timing for the community to do this was also really important.*

3. **Helping facilitate and frame kind of the wide net of the assets** *that they have and to kind of help facilitate it down to major goals is also extremely important.*

4. **Realizing that this is an iterative process, it's not just one time.** *Something that if I were involved in the project for a second year, I would love to redo this project and revisit it.*

I did talk to our current program coordinator that's overseeing the program now, and they are in the process of starting to identify assets and begin a new year to identify what their goals are. And this was a huge tool for momentum to build. And they are really excited to continue in New Year to see what's possible to take action on climate change.

One of the proudest moments I had in the program was seeing everyone in the room working together, across institutions different with different boundaries of you know, taking down barriers of age, and even between the government and nonprofit level. It's just really exciting to see how this tool can be used.

TIP: FRAMING THE ISSUE

Below, Danté DiSabatino and ABCD Consultant Ron Dwyer-Voss clarify the reason for choosing a predefined topic for this asset mapping process rather than a more open-ended framing.

RDV: Because the geography was so broad, we had to put some of that framing up front. What we did was almost inverse... we did some of the framing up front: "What are the assets in Seattle that might be useful to climate change?" Just to bring it down, because we didn't have the time and capacity to do all the assets of the entire region in Seattle. And then we looked at them and said, "Okay, which of these do you want to use? Looking at all these, what could you do?"

And then the kids came up with some art, creative based work, then came up with connecting with clubs

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at schools and connecting them to some of these other assets.

But SYCAN had had this tradition of doing an annual Youth Climate Summit, and when we first started talking about asset mapping with the folks [on the team] before Danté came on, it was asset mapping as a way to find out the resources that can be used to pull off the next successful youth Climate Summit.

Danté and his team were willing to not be that pointed in that inquiry question, which led them to discover that the kids didn't want to do a youth Climate Summit, even though there was a million assets on the wall that could have been used for that. They wanted to do some other things and have more localized focused action.

DS: We did give a general category, because they were already a part of the work with SYCAN because they wanted to take action on climate change. So the question that they were trying to answer is, "What can we do in regards to that?"

> *One of the key contributions that asset mapping often makes through a process is helps us see what we didn't see before. And also not just by the question, but by who you have in the room. So the broader and deeper your recruiting goes to that process, the better tools you get from it.*
>
> *Ron Dwyer-Voss*
> *Faculty, ABCD Institute*

RDV: To be transparent about that at the same time as much as you can, to open it up as possible, the more likely it is you'll discover things you'd hadn't noticed before. That's one of the key contributions that asset mapping often makes through a process is helps us see what we didn't see before. And also not just by the question, but by who you have in the room. So the broader and deeper your recruiting goes to that process, the better tools you get from it.

DS: I have a very small thing to add, something that's worth noting. It had to do with the development of our logic model that was informed by the community that came into the room. A lot of those driving actions, they determined those actions already, before the asset mapping happened. So they figured out what were their goals and objectives for the year. And then they used the asset mapping to help answer the objectives that they came up with and worked with us on for their logic model.

RDV: Danté and his crew actually facilitated the youth developing their logic model. It was pretty phenomenal. [They said to the youth], "Here's the basis of a logic model. Now figure out what you want to do."

DS: It was scary, for sure. But it was amazing.

TIP: EQUALIZING POWER IMBALANCES & AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICES

"How do you make sure that the youth voice is amplified in an asset mapping session, and that someone who perceives themselves as an expert or leader doesn't dominate the conversation?"

DS: That was something that I initially was a little bit worried about.

What I will say is that there were some folks that were in the room that worked with students. I'd say about half of our adult group worked with youth development. And those folks, and myself having been a teacher, we helped use that information in our facilitation to open that space. So [I suggest] really thinking about folks that work with the audience that you're trying to prevent from not having that voice shared.

We also used—if there's a chance to—having almost a second conversation or with this group of organizations. We explained what our goals were to amplify [the youth] to be on that same level. We set the precedent coming in that we all have assets and gifts to share equally and that was very helpful for us, very helpful framing.

RDV: Also we prepped the adults a little bit before and said, you know, "This is going to happen. We're going to end up in some small groups around assets, and you're going to travel with the group. And so make sure your role is to facilitate their voice."

DS: One thing we noticed is that the students, in previous situations, they sometimes can be afraid to share when there's adults in the room. We did set that precedent in the beginning [that] we all have gifts, and we had the prep with the adults—and then the constant reminder of what [Asset Based Community Development]* is all about.

** **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** is a community engagement approach that begins with existing local assets and the capacities and leadership of local citizens and their associations, with local institutions playing a supportive role to resident-cetnered action.*

TO LEARN MORE:

Asset Mapping User Guide https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/tool-asset-mapping-user-guide.pdf

SYCAN Journey Map https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/woodland_park_zoo_journey_map.pdf

Seattle Youth Climate Action Network (SYCAN) https://www.zoo.org/sycan

IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative www.imls.gov/cci

ABCD Institute at DePaul University https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute