



ASSET MAPPING

tools for discovering

RESIDENT-LED ASSOCIATIONS

Below the surface of every neighborhood, people are connected, contributing, and generously caring for one another.

They are already convening, setting priorities, and organizing themselves around them and generating solutions to local challenges (sometimes without even meaning to) and realizing shared aspirations.

How is this happening?

This rich buzz of activity takes place within **associations**—voluntary groups of community members acting together upon things they care about in common. Associations range widely in their focus and style, from informal book clubs or walking groups to more formally organized neighborhood associations, sobriety support groups, or political clubs.

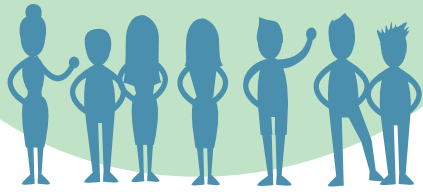
Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) names associations as the second of six key community assets that when recognized and connected, can create powerful positive local change. ABCD also highlights these resident-led groups as one of the most powerful assets with the purposes of mobilizing local capacity and power.

Any library or museum seeking to catalyze community would be wise to begin by learning about local associations, connecting with them, and exploring how to partner with them in ways that center their assets, priorities, and contributions.

Associational Discovery Tools in this document:

1. “Relationships With Associations” Inventory
2. “Partnerships With Associations” Strategy Map
3. Resident Association Group Inventory
4. In-Depth Association Research Process
5. Learning Conversation With Associational Leaders





QUALITIES OF ASSOCIATIONS

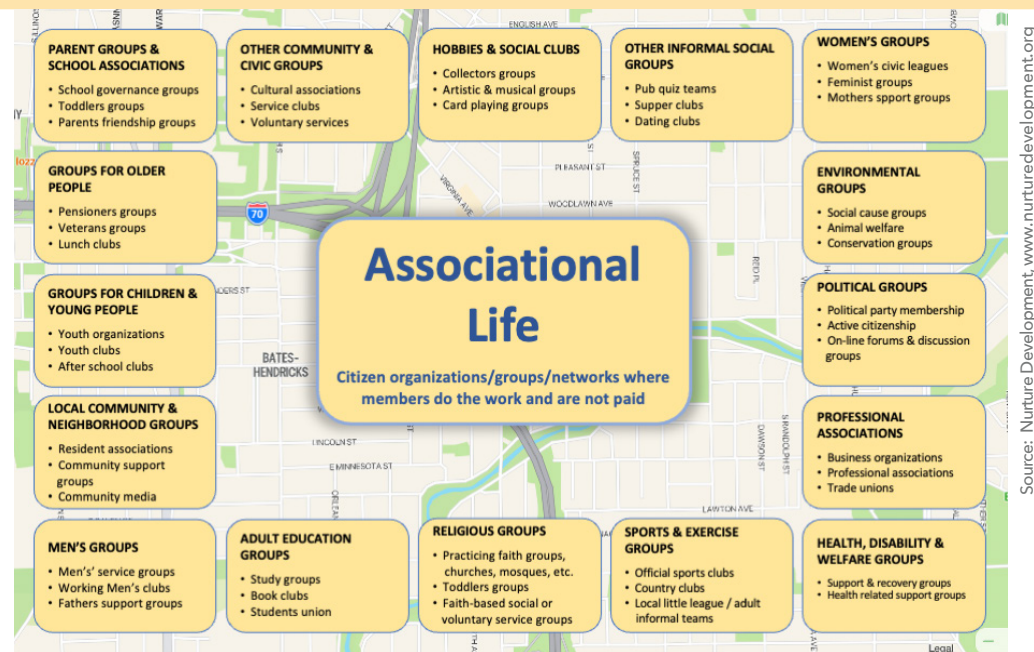
Associations can be large or small, named or unnamed, and can span a community or just a block.

The two defining features associations are that **the unpaid members decide what should be done and do the majority of the work themselves**. Some may have a part-time administrative staff to help coordinate and communicate the group's activities.

Examples of associations include the Friends of the Library groups, knitting groups, and daycare co-ops. They may or may not have a name and can be formal—like the Kiwanis Club—or very informal—like a walking group.

Associations offer unique assets within their neighborhoods related to the work of improving any local place and the lives of those who live there:

- **The individual capacities of members**
- **The power of relationships**
- **Shared interests**
- **Common goals**
- **Local connections**
- **Employment leads**
- **Leadership potential**
- **Passion & Energy**
- **Local knowledge**
- **Commitment**



Source: Nurture Development, www.nurturedevelopment.org

Associations exist in every neighborhood.

One might be tempted to assume that neighborhoods that possess fewer traditional resources, like income, may also have a low number of associations. However, as ABCD founders McKnight and Kretzmann point out based on their extensive research:

It is especially important to note that in lower income neighborhoods, there are many associations that are informal groups without officers or even a name. However, they do vital community work. These groups include five women who watch over the children on the street, three public housing residents who create a garden on a lot beside their building, and four church members who transport older members to the grocery store to shop. The fact that these associations don't have a formal name should not keep us from recognizing what a powerful community force they are. Therefore, any serious inventory of local associations must include these informal groups as vital assets.

THE UNIQUE FUNCTION AND POWER OF ASSOCIATIONS

What makes associations such special and powerful vehicles for catalyzing community change?

1. Because they operate on little to no funds but, rather, are fueled solely by the gifts, talents, and time that community members are willing to readily offer up, **associations function as "Gift Magnifiers" of the individual residents' capacities.**
2. Because they are formed voluntarily and fueled by residents' own time, energy, and talents, **associations are an indicator of what people in the community already care about and want to do with one another.** (When people cease to care about an issue or activity, the association formed around it will typically dissolve.)
3. For those seeking to catalyze community-led action and grow resident power, **associations offer a pre-made infrastructure of connection within the**



watch



for INSPIRATION/DISCUSSION

The Club Is Not the Club

In this 1-minute video, Peter Block describes the ways in which local voluntary associations often contribute vastly more to individual and community well-being than their name might suggest. An excerpt:

“The group is not there for what it says it’s there for. The poker club is not there to play poker. The book club is not there about books. These are people coming together to overcome their isolation, to make contact with each other. And they’re up for doing things they were formed to do. All they need is an invitation.”

Peter Block
Author, *The Abundant Community* and
Community: The Structure of Belonging

community. Rather than approaching community engagement through engaging solely with individual, disconnected residents one-by-one, associations allow catalyzers to tap into existing networks of communication, relationship, and resources.

4. **Associations are often doing many things locally to improve and benefit the community that do not fall within their name or stated focus.** For instance, a book club might be helping raise money for a school, or a men’s basketball group may be mentoring younger men.
5. **Associations are often willing to do more than they are already doing,** if given the invitation. For an example, see this [case study of Chicago’s Grand Boulevard Neighborhood](#).
6. One way in which associations and their members often improve and help solve community issues is their relational nature. **They are containers and incubators for an abundance of person-to-person care, resource and information sharing, and networking.** This is due to the authentic quality of relationships we tend to form when we connect and collaborate by choice with others who share our interests.
7. **Associations are a space in which residents already feel (and are) powerful.** If you are seeking to grow community-led change, it makes the most sense to begin by approaching places where this leadership is already being exercised.

Associations also play a vital role in a healthy democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville, now recognized as one of the first sociologists, came to this conclusion after an immersive study of American democracy, which he conducted in 1831 on behalf of the French government.

De Tocqueville discovered that the main ingredient making American democracy particularly robust was its unique culture and abundance of citizen-led, voluntary associations on any and every topic one could think of. When Americans wanted something to happen, they did not wait for the government or some other body to act. Rather, they found three or four other community members who shared their concern, formed an association, and made it happen themselves.



WHY BEGIN WITH ASSOCIATIONS?

It's easy to slip into the habit of thinking that only institutions, paid professionals, and professionally delivered programs offer the best solutions for local problems and possibilities. But in reality, community members possess a vast array of skills, talents, and resources and are constantly self-organizing to solve problems and realize positive goals. Their groups and their accomplishments are less visible, less celebrated, and often not the first thing we think of when we want to “convene stakeholders” or “mobilize the community.” Yet these groups hold a critical space in which residents not only have already begun acting with others around what they care about, but also feel comfortable, confident, and connected enough to do even more, if asked.

A radical shift in power and possibility occurs when traditionally powerful, respected, and well-resourced institutions like libraries and museums and their staff recognize and legitimize the work of these resident-driven organizations.

Museums and libraries that see the value in associations and seek them out are taking a key step toward becoming more community-centered. They are grounding themselves in the critical spirit of humility, curiosity, and respect for the capacity of everyday residents when seeking to authentically support creative and sustainable resident-led solutions. To look first for how community members have already chosen to organize and spend time learning about, documenting, and eventually building relationships with them sends a message of great respect for the existing capacity within neighborhoods and neighbors—for their skills, priorities, and lived experiences.

Beginning in this way will help libraries and museums learn how they might best act in support of residents to realize their own vision of their lives and community.

TOOLS FOR DISCOVERING ASSOCIATIONAL ASSETS

There are many ways to go about uncovering the existing associations within a neighborhood or community. **In the following pages, you'll find a range of options you can try out and weave into your own work to mobilize local assets and grow resident power.** The first exercises are quicker and less intensive, followed by more involved and in-depth processes.

"RELATIONSHIPS WITH ASSOCIATIONS" INVENTORY

Use this tool to help you think through as wide a span of local groups and clubs as possible that your library or museum may already be connected to. This tool will also help you see more clearly where there are opportunities to build more or stronger connections.

Source: [The Engaged Library](#)

RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS:

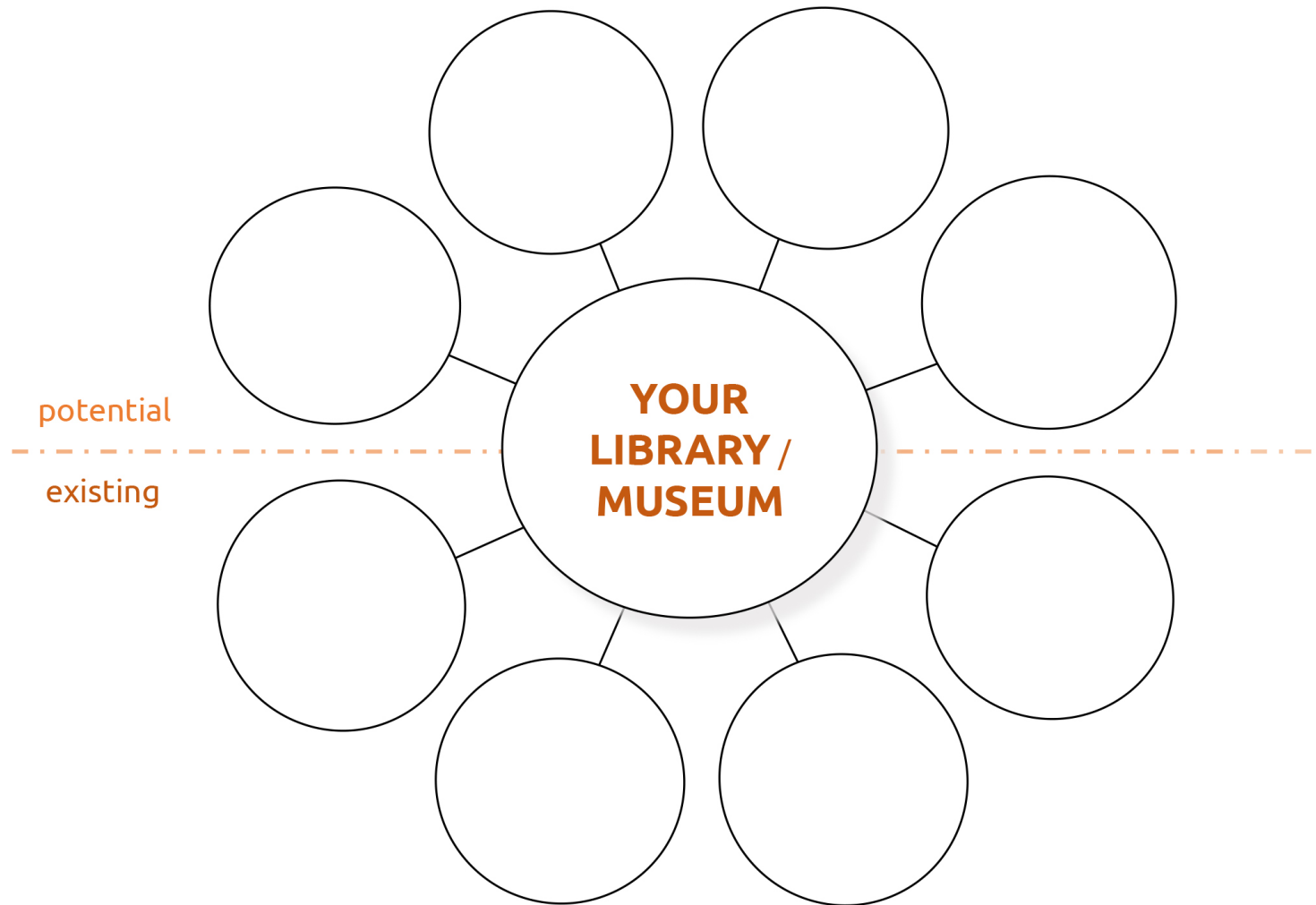
Our library/museum has relationships with:	Not at All		Some		A Great Deal	
Faith-based groups Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Health groups Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
School groups Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Outdoor groups Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Block clubs Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Service clubs Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Youth groups Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Arts organizations Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	
Other Describe:	1	2	3	4	5	

"PARTNERSHIPS WITH ASSOCIATIONS" STRATEGY MAP

Use this tool to illustrate partnerships that your library already has with associations in your community and to think about new partnerships that might be useful to your library.

Source: [The Engaged Library](#)

Partnerships with Associations



RESIDENT ASSOCIATION GROUP INVENTORY

Source: [Releasing the Power of Local Associations](#)

Below is a simple process for partnering with community members to generate a starting inventory of local associations.

An important part of the community development process involves the identification of all the neighborhood's assets. Therefore, an inventory of local associations is a basic step in mobilizing the power of the community.

1. One way to start is to ask a group of local citizens to identify all the associations to which they belong and the names of all the others they know about. Often, the participants will be surprised to see how many local groups they know.
2. This beginning list can then be shared with other associations and their members asked to add groups they find missing.

This process will help inform and interest local associations in their number, diversity, and significance.



"sometimes hugs can be better than money,"
Judy Morrow (above with Lois Smidt, *Beyond Welfare*)
Photo by Kristin Senty

STORIES OF ASSOCIATIONAL CARE

by Cormac Russell

Steve runs a militaria shop in Cheltenham. But what few people know is that he also informally provides space for retired service member to connect with each other. Rob runs a poker night on Fridays in Limerick, Ireland, where he intentionally invites some of his neighbors who are living alone; some are estranged from their families, while others forget to buy food, yet others seldom wash themselves. They play cards together along with other male friends of Rob's, who work, run their own businesses, and care for their families. The rules are the same for everyone: shower and shave before you come, and before the game begins everyone calls someone in their family or friendship network they haven't spoken to during the week.

In a basement of a Presbyterian Church in Ames, Iowa, friends gather for a meal. Some are on welfare, some are not. All are friends. They eat together, but they also have a ritual, which starts with an expression of "what's been new and good this week" and "wants and offers." It is not at all surprising that when it comes to getting a job it's not what you know, it isn't even who you know. It's who you know who knows who you need to know. These meals are a powerful and enjoyable way to thicken social networks and narrow the gap between individuals living on low income and purposeful and satisfying job opportunities. They also disrupt many of the labels that people affix to folks living on welfare.

Each of the above three examples charts an alternative path toward social welfare and care. In contrast to many of the traditional approaches that tend toward institutional or program-based responses, they opt for associational solutions. **Associational relationships are intentionally driven by the citizen muscle and the heartfelt care of near neighbors, in preference to salaried strangers. Not because one is superior to the other, but because each has a unique and irreplaceable set of functions.**

IN-DEPTH ASSOCIATION RESEARCH PROCESS

Source: [Releasing the Power of Local Associations](#)

The following associational discovery process was used by a research team at the Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University. This process uncovered 575 associations in one Chicago neighborhood! It also produced valuable relationship-building and new learning about the culture and realities within the neighborhood.

The team writes:

“The research staff of the Community Studies Program of the Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University set out to identify as many groups as possible that people belong to within one Chicago neighborhood. (The staff worked in an older Chicago neighborhood, measuring approximately 24 square blocks and housing 85,000 people; a neighborhood rich in diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups.) We wanted a way that was simple, inexpensive, quick, and productive.”

The team found three ways that worked:

- using newspapers, directories, and other printed sources
- talking to people at local institutions, such as parks and churches
- conducting a telephone survey of a sample of local residents

To read their detailed account, see [Releasing the Power of Local Associations: A Guide to Finding Out About Neighborhood Groups](#), (pp. 113-119).



PROCESS

Getting Started: Using Printed Sources

Newspapers and Magazines

- Review four or more consecutive issues of the weekly community newspaper published for the neighborhood we were studying. Circle any mention of events, club, meetings, sports, and recreational groups, and anything else people could join.
- Review the Sunday arts section of a citywide paper (e.g., the Chicago Tribune), which included information on events and cultural groups around the city. While not targeted to the neighborhood, this listing can include some additional groups in which local people might be involved.
- Review a citywide monthly magazine. These magazines often publish a quarterly “Involvement” section listing volunteer and self-help programs in various areas around the city.
- Special-purpose newspapers published by a local political party, community organization, environmental group, or church group can also be helpful.

Directories

Often someone has already published a listing of the community's organizations, and you can shorten your work by using it. Such directories may be published by the community newspaper, the alderperson's office (or other local political leaders), the public library, the United Way (we used a citywide directory, but it identified local groups), churches, and community organizations.

Other information is available in more general directories:

- **The Phone Book.** In the Yellow Pages, check the listings under Associations and Organizations, Fraternities. In the white pages, look under the name of the neighborhood (e.g., Rogers Park Historical Society, Chatham Businessmen's Association), or if you know what ethnic groups predominate in the neighborhood, you can look under that name (e.g., Polish-American Congress) to see if there's a local branch.
- **Encyclopedia of Associations** (published by the Gale Research Company) is usually available through public libraries. The newly published Regional Editions, which list regional, state, and local organizations, can be helpful.
- **Self-Help Directories.** Hospitals often publish lists of self-help groups (for new mothers, widows or widowers, people who've had various operations or chronic diseases, families of people with Alzheimer's, etc.). Self-Help/Mutual Aid Directories can be found in some states and list a broad range of selfhelp groups including art and poetry groups, women's groups, and the like.

Contacting Local Institutions

Libraries

A good way to track down local groups is to go to the places where they meet. From our newspaper search, for example, we discovered that many groups met at the local library. We contacted the librarian and obtained information about groups meeting there as well as the library's self-published directory of local organizations.

Parks and Recreational Facilities

Another popular meeting place is the local park. Not only recreational groups, but other general purpose groups—community organizations and local school councils—often use park facilities for meetings. Calls to local park directors can yield information on groups that meet there; some park directors may be willing to send you detailed listings. Other recreational sites might also provide information; for example, a call or visit to local bowling alleys should produce information about leagues or other groups that use the lanes.

Churches

"By far the most important meeting places in many neighborhoods are local religious institutions. Churches, mosques, and synagogues not only provide meeting space for outside groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, but they also organize their own membership in a variety of ways (women's groups, youth groups, etc.). For a good many people, their only formal membership is in or through their church. For this reason, we recommend making a special effort to identify church-related organizations by obtaining a list of neighborhood churches from a local community organization, local hotels, or hospitals."

Begin with a letter to the local churches explaining what you are trying to find out and why you thought it would be useful. Along with the letter we included a list of different types of organizations. (See Appendices 2, [pp. 126-127 of the source document](#)).

Follow your letter with phone calls to the pastor or other staff member. Sometimes, the pastor simply went through the list; others had forgotten (or not received) the list, but willingly provided information anyway. (Alternately, you can call without sending a letter first.)

Suggested questions for pastors or church staff members:

- *What groups does the church sponsor? (If necessary, add a prompting question, e.g.: What about Bible study?) Is the purpose of this group social, spiritual, or recreational? How often does it meet?*
- *Is it open to anyone in the community or only church members? What [other neighborhood] groups use the church as a meeting place? (You could add a prompt, e.g., What about book clubs?)*
- *How else is the church used by the community? (You could add a prompt, e.g.: How about informal classes in aerobics or photography?)*



Send pastors who are unreachable by phone a follow-up letter with a list of associations and a form to fill out identifying groups sponsored by or meeting at the church, with information about each.

Following Up... As a best practice, consider sharing your findings with institutions and associations who provided you with information. The team writes:

“Many pastors were interested in what we were doing and asked for a copy of the finished product, which we promised to provide. We sent every pastor a second follow-up letter giving them an opportunity to review the information about their church before we published it.”

Contacting Individuals

There are at least two ways you can approach contacting individuals:

1. **Conduct interviews of residents** within blocks identified as “typical” of the neighborhood. See detailed description in [pp. 116-118 of the source document](#).
2. **Find and talk with Connectors.** When you are talking with organizational representatives (churches, libraries), ask them if they can name which residents seem to be highly well connected, trusted, and active in the neighborhood and community. If your interviewee knows the person, ask them to introduce you. If you can identify one or two of these Connectors, they will likely be able to provide you with a wealth of knowledge about additional associations both formal and informal, but you will also likely have just formed a relationship with a valuable informal guide to the neighborhood.

Suggested resident interview questions:

- *Can you name any groups you’ve heard of or participated in? Do they meet in your neighborhood? Is there a local neighborhood organization in your area? What about a book club?*
- *Is there any church or religious organization you’re involved with? If yes, within the church, are there any other groups or clubs that you’re a part of?*
- *Are there any other special interest groups that you or people in your family are in, such as women’s or men’s groups, veterans organizations, artistic clubs, or other clubs? What about informal groups?*
- *Do you get together or associate with your neighbors?*
- *How else do you feel a part of the community? How else do you get involved in your neighborhood?*



TIPS AND REFLECTIONS

The Northwestern University research team offered these reflections:

“Using the methods we’ve described here, we were able to identify 575 groups that were located in the neighborhood or had neighborhood residents as members.

The most productive method for us was contacting local leaders, like church pastors or librarians. These people were generally cooperative and were able to provide a good deal of very useful information about neighborhood groups. The other two methods also provided useful (though more general) information for a relatively small expenditure of time.

We were studying a city neighborhood, and our conclusions are drawn from that urban area. In a different type of community—a small town or suburb, for example—the conclusions might be different; churches might be a less important source of information than, say, the local newspaper.

Not reflected in the tables was the wealth of information we learned, especially from personal calls and conversations with pastors. For example, several church leaders spoke of strong church membership in earlier years, which had dwindled when new ethnic groups moved into the neighborhood. Other people mentioned that because most parents are employed, there is less time available for community involvement. We also came across some people who are clearly very involved in the neighborhood and who would be excellent contacts for getting acquainted with other local residents.”

NOTE: As you explore these resources to build your inventory of associations, be sure to distinguish between which listings are associations and which are more institutional nonprofits. You can use the definitions of associations offered earlier in this toolkit to help you.

LEARNING CONVERSATION WITH ASSOCIATIONAL LEADERS

The Learning Conversation is a template for holding one-on-one conversations with associational representatives. These conversations will provide you with a full picture of the associations while also opening up a conversation with them that can lead to collaboration opportunities.

Once you have identified which associations you are already connected to and which you would like to connect to, Learning Conversations are an excellent way to go deeper in learning the assets and contributive activities of these associations. They will also strengthen your relationship with them. By accomplishing these two things, you and your library or museum can more effectively center community and resident-led change.

A Learning Conversation is an opportunity to build a relationship by seeking to discover motivation to act: the care that generates connection and action. Each citizen has personal motivations to act and each citizen association or congregation has shared motivations to act. What an association cares about at a particular moment may or may not be captured in its official mission statement—in many associations, formal statements may not have caught up with members' developing concerns and purposes.

Learning Conversation with an Association Leader (Example)

Introduce yourself, your group and your purpose.

Example: *We are the parents association of PS 112, seeking to involve local associations in improving literacy in our community.*

Learn about...

- The association—Name, address, telephone, contact person
- Their meetings—Time, date, place, open or by invitation
- Their leaders—Who are they? What do they each do?
- Their primary purpose—What does their association do? Why do they do it?
- What else do they do?
- What might they do in the future? Why might they do it?
- Interest in our purpose?

Many people read poorly in our community. Local associations are working together to raise literacy here. Do you think your association or some of your members might be interested in working on this issue with us?

- If interested, what are next steps?

How to involve your membership?

How do we find out what your association might want to do?

- What other local associations are you connected to?
- Do you think any others might be interested in our purpose?

Who do you know personally?

Would you introduce us?

- Who else should we get to know?



The listener works first to understand what the person or association cares about enough to act. Then the listener asks themselves...

How does this person's or association's motivation to act weave them into the tapestry of our community partnership?

What assets could they bring?

Who else shares or complements what they care about enough to act?

See the "[Asset Mapping Toolkit 4: Listening Campaign](#)" to learn more about how to integrate learning conversations into a larger asset mapping and community-building process.



REFERENCES

Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. (1993). [Building communities from the inside out: a path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets](#). Evanston, IL: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Community Catalyst Asset-Mapping Toolkit:

INTRO: [Asset Mapping Overview & User Guide](#)

TOOLS:

- 1: [Individual Gifts & Skills](#)
- 2: [Resident-led Associations](#) (*this document*)
- 3: [Institutional Assets](#)
- 4: [Agency-Led Asset Mapping](#)

CCI Stories of Practice: [Woodland Zoo / Seattle Youth Climate Action Network](#)
[Emory Rose Archives Library](#)
[Free Library of Philadelphia Catalyst Toolkit](#)

More on Associations

[Voluntary Associations in Low-Income Neighborhoods: An Unexplored Community Resource](#) (Kretzmann & McKnight)

[Touchstone Four: Engaging Local Groups and Associations](#) (Russell & Charida)

[Differentiating the Functions of Institutions and Associations](#) (McKnight)

[The Four-Legged Stool](#) (McKnight)

[video: The Club is Not the Club](#) (Block)

[A Study of the Community Benefits Provided by Local Associations](#) (McKnight)

www.abcdinstitute.org (Asset-Based Community Development Institute)



TO LEARN MORE about the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, visit www.imls.gov/cc

This toolkit was prepared by the ABCD Evaluation Team for the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, composed of Faculty from the Asset Based Community Development Institute.
Lead Author: *April Doner*