Community Asset Mapping
Purpose and Values

Community Asset Mapping (CAM) is a process that builds on the community's strengths. Essentially, the goal of asset mapping is to develop a better understanding of the community environment, its resident's experiences, informal resources as well as the current system of support programs. It highlights the interconnections among people, resources and assets of a community and serves to facilitate a discussion of resident and interagency collaboration and cooperation to lead to a more comprehensive system that supports. CAM can be used to improve education and workforce and economic development in a community by aligning available services and resources, streamlining those services and resources, and identifying areas of need. It is a way to organize information and can provide a common context for creating a vision for the future.

CAM is an assessment tool that prepares a stakeholder group to do further work, such as strategic planning or making significant decisions. It includes relevant factual data such as an organizational or community history, accomplishments, industry and/or economic trends and subjective data such as resident, customer, staff or community perceptions. Activities can help participants gain insight into factors that may be driving or influencing their organization or community. It is essential for a group to know and understand the significance of these influences before it can start a planning process.

CAM is a collaborative process that includes parents/residents and members of community organizations as equal partners, seeking to identify strengths of the community as well as cultural aspects, similarities and differences between community members, and how to care for the community. It does not look at what is wrong, what is not working, but rather focuses on what is strong, what is working and the strengths and resources already available and it seeks to increase the capacity of those.

It is relationship driven. Key to this process is the idea that resources refer not only to fiscal capacity but also include people's knowledge, skills and personal and professional relationships. It does not focus on programs, rather CAM builds partnerships among various community stakeholders to meet an agreed upon goal or vision. It is not controlling, it embraces the notion of lateral leadership working with local stakeholders across programs and boundaries.

The data collected as determined by the stakeholder planners may include environmental features geographic/demographic markers, economic factors, organization capacity, services, supports formal and informal networks and associations, institutional resources and individual resident gifts and leadership. CAM is asset based (what we have), internally focused (resident input and community oriented), and relationship driven with strong communication systems. The actual tasks involve listing and listening.

Unlike the needs assessments that usually involve outside experts performing the evaluation and creating the solution, CAM is a strengths based view and performed by community members who collect data and examine resources, which ranges from creating lists of services in a community to the foundation of strategic planning. Mapping the community provides

information to create a clear picture of the resources available and to develop a better understanding of the current system to inform the continuation or revision of existing policies, practices and programs, and/or the formation of new policies, practices, programs or access pathways. The community member driven process distinguishes internal capacity and where there may be a need for external support.

It is important to recognize concerns and gaps, but not let them stop the process of finding assets. The community asset map can be used to identify resources that can be targeted to resolve concerns or reduce gaps. The map may look like an actual map with streets and rivers. The map will also include other data represented in matrixes, graphs and/or lists and narrative descriptions, which serve to provide a fresh perspective, a new way to look at the community.

The environmental scan that is conducted and the analysis of information about real and perceived needs provides a basis for a discussion of interagency collaboration and cooperation to lead to a more comprehensive system that utilizes strengths and addresses needs. The alignment and streamlining of resources and identification of service gaps within the community, enables stakeholders to understand the range of services available within the community, as well as be able to develop new services and supports targeted to fill existing gaps. Because of resource mapping, families have more flexibility and choice in navigating the systems.

CAM can help communities to accomplish a number of goals, including:

- Identifying what the community already has (and may not have known)
- New resources
- Ensuring that community residents have access to the resources they need
- Avoiding duplication of services and resources
- Cultivating new partnerships and relationships
- Providing information across agencies
- Encouraging collaboration

In summary, the community resource mapping process addresses the continued emphasis placed on the importance of collaborative planning and provision of coordinated services and supports at national, state and local levels. Meeting community needs ultimately depends on the identification, integration and alignment of its assets, and services and supports within communities, as well as the development of meaningful interconnections among those resources and assets, and connnections among systems and partnerships among various stakeholders. By building on a community's assets and shared goals, Community Asset Mapping assists stakeholders in their work to achieve and sustain positive outcomes.