Chapter 4. Assessing Resources and Needs

Overview

This chapter focuses on useful steps for conducting an assessment of the designated community. A neighborhood assessment, which is at the heart of the planning process for the Weed and Seed strategy, is used to identify the resources within the community. It also provides an ideal forum to broaden the engagement of residents by soliciting their ideas, concerns, and priorities relative to their vision for the community. This chapter is critical for both new and existing sites because conditions in communities change and revisions to current strategies will be necessary from time to time.

Assets and Needs

After selecting the site for Weed and Seed, the Steering Committee must oversee a comprehensive community assessment that focuses on identifying both assets and needs. Examples of community assets cover a wide range of services and physical structures; they include a list of resident-led organizations, an inventory of housing stock, identification of social service programs, and a description of the business community and government satellite offices. In fact, an asset can be any resource that is making or has the potential to make a positive impact on the community. A key benefit in conducting an assessment is to ensure that Steering Committee members are operating from a common base of information about the conditions of and activities in the area. It also serves as a baseline of information for helping to reallocate critical resources.

Although several assessment models exist in community development literature, each Weed and Seed site has the ability to develop some creative tools that will help in gathering critical information for analysis. Not everyone on the Steering Committee is expected to become a researcher or an analyst; however, everyone is expected to have some role in identifying, collecting, and analyzing the information to provide a clear picture of the conditions to be addressed. A community assessment that involves residents and other area stakeholders who may not have worked together before provides a strong bridge-building tool.

Historically, community assessments focused on data collected from the census or other government sources and on the problems affecting an area. These reports often created a perception that no viable resources existed within a distressed community. However, all communities have some assets. Although the number of assets in a distressed area may be fewer than those in other areas, these assets do exist, and it is important to identify them before planning the local strategy.

Some assets that may be recognized by community residents do not appear on official lists or reports. An example of an asset might be a group of former gang members now helping young children to avoid involvement with gangs. Traditional assessment processes would probably not identify this group as an asset, which is why resident input during the design of the assessment process is vital. Senior residents who know the neighborhood's history are

another asset a traditional assessment might miss. Seniors are an important asset because they can contribute ideas about resources. In addition, their input is essential when developing goals for the community policing component of the Weed and Seed strategy.

Although the importance of site selection cannot be overemphasized, community assessment is also of great importance. The selection of a neighborhood should be considered a major investment in its people and physical structures. A main consideration in any investment is the return on investment: what will be realized as a result of the investment. The same thinking should apply to the assessment process. However, in some communities, not all of the required entities will be present. In tribal communities, for example, businesses may not exist on the reservation. Alternative efforts may be necessary, such as development of the legal and environmental infrastructures.

One of the challenges in forming a new Weed and Seed site is finding the time to conduct a thorough community assessment. It may be prudent to use previously prepared reports secured from other organizations. Often, the city, county, township, and/or tribal government or community groups have conducted some type of community assessment for other

purposes. Recognizing the time constraints of Steering Committee members, it may be advisable to use an assessment conducted within the past 2 years as a basis for the Weed and Seed instrument and to determine which areas need additional analysis to complete the overall Weed and Seed community assessment.

The following steps can provide a guide for conducting a community assessment.

Implementation Process

Step 1: Assemble the Team To Conduct the Assessment

Once the decision has been made to use a previously conducted assessment or begin anew, it is time to assemble the assessment team. An effective strategy in conducting the community assessment is to involve residents, both young and old, in the data collection process. This mix of team members ensures diversity in the information collected. It may also be the first time many residents have been engaged in a process that seeks their ideas and concerns in helping to build a strong and viable community. This level of participation will serve as a foundation for Weed and Seed as the overall strategies unfold in the community.

The Steering Committee may decide to operate as the assessment team or may think it wiser to create a team of individuals that would include representatives from the Steering Committee and other groups or residents who may ultimately serve on one of the subcommittees. It may also be useful to seek expertise from a local educational institution to help provide the framework for the assessment process.

Step 2: Determine the Type of Information To Be Collected

Before beginning to collect data, determine what type of information is needed and how it will be

used. The purpose of an assessment process is to identify both the community issues and the resources available to resolve them. Not everyone will agree on the needs and resources; it is therefore important that the assessment process use several methods to gather information and that it collect both primary and secondary data.

Primary data typically involve information collected from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, and forums. Secondary data include information that has already been published in some form, such as reports, studies, and census information. The secondary data can be obtained from sources such as city, tribal, or other jurisdictional agencies, local libraries, and local and tribal colleges and universities. Much of this information may also exist on the Internet.

One recommended way of gathering primary data is to convene community meetings to formally introduce the Weed and Seed concept and provide an overview of the importance of the community assessment. Surveys can be distributed during these sessions. If there are non-English-speaking individuals in the community, disseminate the survey in two or more languages to secure maximum participation.

It is important for residents to understand that the community assessment is their opportunity to offer their ideas, concerns, and recommendations for the community. As residents recognize that the Weed and Seed strategy is designed to include them, they will be more open to sharing and contributing to the overall process.

Step 3: Take Inventory of the Neighborhood

Understanding the characteristics of the selected site is necessary to provide a picture of the community, including the qualities and unique elements that distinguish the designated Weed

and Seed site from other parts of the city or other jurisdiction. This information is an important element in developing a strategy for the Weed and Seed site.

After taking inventory of the various characteristics that make up a community, it is time to assess both the public and private facilities and resources found in the community and what roles they can play in the implementation of Weed and Seed strategies. The objective is to ascertain to what extent resources exist in the community and how well these resources have served the residents.

Public-sector and/or tribal resources and facilities

There are public-sector resources that serve all communities. The degree to which these services extend into a locality can have a significant impact on the lives of the residents. The following key resources should be considered in terms of their impact on the designated site.

Transportation. Critical questions are what type of public transportation system exists in the designated site and how accessible it is for residents.

Public safety, fire, schools, and social services. One of the key elements of Weed and Seed is the involvement of public safety officials. Most communities have either a police precinct, public safety substation, or firehouse. Schools such as community or tribal colleges and universities can offer services related to evaluations. In addition, other social service offices can be located in communities to increase residents' access to them.

Employment skills and resources

From an employer's perspective, it is vital to know what skills residents possess. Knowing the skills base of the designated Weed and Seed

community is critical to determining whether alternative restoration strategies should be implemented to attract new businesses.

Community-serving institutions

Public, tribal, and private institutions play vital roles in every community. If several institutions have been identified through secondary data, try to understand how residents perceive these resources and whether they are accessible to residents.

Health and recreation resources

Healthy communities begin with healthy residents. Hospitals and other health-related facilities were once considered separate from the community, but they are now seen as critical anchors to communities.

Crime and disorder

Although the types of data or information collected thus far are assets or resources that can positively affect a community, it is also necessary to document community needs and problems. Any criminal activity occurring in the designated area is an important element in the community's needs category. This information will be useful to the Steering Committee as it develops a crime and asset map for further analysis and strategy development.

The police department maintains the bulk of the information related to criminal activity. In fact, police calls for service generally provide a picture of order or disorder in a locality along with data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports.

Step 4: Develop a Crime and Asset Map

The information gathered can be incorporated into a crime and asset mapping process, which enables a community to locate the geographic boundaries of a jurisdiction and plot resources and threats. Results include identifying current and potential criminal hotspots; opportunities for business development; potential Safe Havens; economic zones; and important buildings such as schools, hospitals, social service agencies, and public and Indian housing developments.

For those Weed and Seed sites that do not yet have a crime mapping capability, the strategy may assist them in developing a crime mapping initiative. Partnering with agencies, courts, schools, and others enables the designated site to obtain current data sets and to train interested individuals.

Using the complete inventory of assets, the Steering Committee can set priorities based on the critical challenges facing the community. Although some of these challenges may not be addressed in the Weed and Seed strategy, they should be recorded because other entities, including the city or other governing jurisdiction, may be able to address them while the Weed and Seed strategy is being executed.

Step 5: Identify Existing Resources and Develop New Ones

Once Steering Committee members identify gaps in resources, they can begin to formulate plans for bringing existing resources into the community and for developing new ones tailored to meet its needs. The first step in bringing in

existing resources is to develop an inventory of all resource providers and identify their type and availability. The list of providers should begin with the agencies and organizations that are represented on the Weed and Seed Steering Committee. Organizations that serve the community but are located outside the boundaries of the designated area also should be added to the list.

Begin with current resource providers and explore the potential for obtaining additional services from them. Members of the Steering Committee can use their contacts to increase the participation of these organizations as well as to identify new ones willing to provide additional resources to the community. From the weeding perspective, the creation of the task force will help identify and bring new resources to the table. From the seeding perspective, citywide organizations or Indian Tribes might consider establishing an office in the community.

Step 6: Document Resources

Although all organizations may not have representatives on the Steering Committee, many are willing to pledge certain resources to

support a community strategy. This combination of organizations represented and resources pledged can be leveraged to generate additional resources.

When seeking monetary support from area financial institutions, private business owners, or foundations, these organizations will need

Exhibit 4–1. Inventory of Possible Resource Providers

Organization/ Entity	Resource Provided	Type of Organization	Member of Steering Committee? Yes/No	Comments

to know what resources have already been leveraged and the gap they will be filling to complete the overall strategy requirements.

Implementation Issues

An assessment of the resources and needs of a community may seem to be a daunting task, but the information this assessment collects will be worth the time and trouble. It will allow the Steering Committee to move forward better prepared to implement the strategy and develop plans for the site. The assessment should also be seen as an ongoing data-gathering process. No community remains static. Elements that will affect the strategy are constantly changing.

Exhibit 4–2. Data "Wish List"—Crime Mapping Research Center

This is a list of potential data that may be available for your area. This is not a complete inventory of data that you may want to collect. Instead, use it as a framework. Place a check by those data layers that you would like to obtain and add additional ones. Fill in whether they are currently available in digital form, who/which agency is a potential source, and how often data are updated. Many of these data are often available from other government agencies, such as county/city engineering, the planning department, the tax office, the department of social services, among many others. Check with as many of these as possible so that you avoid recreating datasets that already exist. From this worksheet, you can determine what your data needs are. This can be used as the first step in creating complete data specifications and documentation for each data layer. Remember the data layers and the attributes associated with them determine what your agency will be able to analyze within GIS. For example, if you do not collect (and enter into GIS) the day of the week a crime took place, then you will NOT be able to map it or analyze it. So, once you return to your agency, establish a group of interested people and take the time to develop a complete list with all of the desired attributes.

Would Like (yes/no)	Data Layer	Potential Attributes (circle those desired and add additional ones)	Currently Available (yes/no/dk)	Source (or potential source)	Updates (how often/who is responsible)
	Street centerline	Address range, name, direction, speed limit, type			
	Police boundaries	Jurisdiction, name			
	Offenses (from RMS)	Code, incident address, reporting address, recovery address, date, time of day, day of week, MO, UCR, suspect			
	Calls for service (from CAD)	Address, date, time of day, day of week			
	Arrests	Address where arrest took place, address of arrest, time of day, day of week			
	Parks	Name, hours of operation			
	Railroads				
	Hydrology (lakes, rivers)				
	Tax parcels	Owner name, owner address, value			
	Census tracts	Tract number, demographic data (population, age, gender, race, etc.), socioeconomic data (income, etc.)			
	Census blockgroups	Blockgroup number, demographic data, socioeconomic data			
	Census blocks	Block number, demographic data, socioeconomic data			
	Neighborhoods	Neighborhood name, names of community organizations			

(continued)

Exhibit 4–2. Data "Wish List"—Crime Mapping
Research Center (continued)

Would Like (yes/no)	Data Layer	Potential Attributes (circle those desired and add additional ones)	Currently Available (yes/no/dk)	Source (or potential source)	Updates (how often/who is responsible)
	Police boundaries	Name, number			
	Digital ortho-photos				
	ATM	Address, name			
	Hospitals/ care centers	Address, name			
	Bus stops and routes	Name, hours of operation			
	Conven-ience stores	Name, address, owner, hours of operation			
	Churches	Name, address			
	Schools	Name, address, type, number of students			
	Liquor stores	Name, address, owner			
	Shelters (DV, Runaways)				

Exhibit 4–3. Sample Resource Directory

[Site Name] Weed and Seed Strategy

Resource Requests

Contact Person: _____ <u>33</u>

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Affiliation/Agency: _____

Group Use: _____

Deadline: _____

Resource Category: _____

Item Description: _____

_____

_____

Resource Value: _____

_____

_____

Restrictions: _____

_____

_____

Possible Uses: _____

_____

_____

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Note: Resources need executive-level approval (e.g., mayor, tribal president) and a process for requesting resources.