



# Community Mapping and Reflection

The community and neighborhood dynamics surrounding your program can have a considerable impact on your youth, shaping their experiences and needs, and providing both opportunities and challenges. This tool is designed to help you get a picture of young people's day-to-day environments, with a focus on trends and issues related to equity and diversity. In addition to supporting your understanding of young people's lives, the community mapping and reflection process will enable you to begin assessing how your program is equipped to respond to things like demographic changes or community tensions, and to identify ways you are positioned to draw on available cultural and social resources. It may also help you surface new goals and strategies to better connect your program with the individuals and neighborhoods you serve.

## Part A: Community Mapping

If you have a large staff, we suggest conducting the mapping activity in groups of four or five. Materials for each group should include chart paper and markers or crayons. Within the small group, map/draw the neighborhood or community where your program is located. You may include physical elements such as stores, churches, schools, fast food places, outdoor areas, other youth programs, etc. Also represent on your community map both the opportunities and the challenges you believe children and youth are encountering as a result of local demographic, political, and economic circumstances.

Please be aware that mapping/drawing styles will vary. Some groups may choose to “map” out the issues conceptually, with words, images, or symbols representing the different opportunities and challenges your youth face in their communities. Others may choose to focus on the literal environment by drawing actual streets and landmarks, and examine what is happening in the community in specific areas. Choose what works best for you, as there is no one way to do this activity.

It may help to think of one particular young person you work with and his/her journey from home and/or school to the program. Try to envision what this young person encounters on his/her daily excursions (i.e. walking past a community center, abandoned building, park, etc.; hearing one or many languages; long bus ride; turf concerns; and so on). If your program serves more than one neighborhood or community, assign each small group to focus on a different area. If you have already completed the Listen to the Youth Tool, you might find it helpful to refer to the youths’ community maps or to information you gained from the interviews or neighborhood walks, particularly if there are staff members who aren’t totally familiar with your surrounding environment.

Regroup as a whole staff to share your community maps. Discuss the issues, trends, and dynamics that came up. It is likely that your community maps will surface things that are not necessarily viewed the same way by all your staff, so it is important to be accepting of different perspectives.

## Part B: Reflecting On How Your Program Can Respond

After sharing the maps, a facilitator should draw a chart on a large piece of paper divided into four sections: Strengths; Gaps/Weaknesses; Opportunities; and Fears/Challenges (see attached worksheet). This chart will allow you to begin assessing how your program is equipped to respond to the realities that young people in the community experience on a daily basis. Staff should generate lists for each quadrant using the following questions, and one person should chart the answers:

- ☞ What are some of the program's **strengths** that enable you to help young people build on the community resources and respond to the challenges identified in your community maps? (e.g. bilingual staff to communicate with Spanish-speaking youth and parents; community service projects; Appalachian quilting class)
- ☞ What are the program's current **gaps and weaknesses** that make it difficult to help participants build on these resources and respond to these challenges? (e.g. many mentors not familiar with community; majority of programming geared toward African American participants and not enough for growing Southeast Asian population)
- ☞ What practical or learning **opportunities** might be available to help you better support young people in dealing with the community circumstances you have identified? (e.g. partnering with other community organizations more familiar with neighborhood populations and dynamics; open staff position that can be filled with LGBT staff person; new grant possibility)
- ☞ What are some of your **fears and challenges** in helping youth and positioning the program to address these circumstances? (e.g. developing relationships between program and community will take time; pressure to improve test scores interferes with multicultural enrichment; don't have resources to support children with disabilities)

Once your chart is complete, debrief with the following questions. Be sure to take notes of the group's discussion/conclusions as they will later inform your action planning.

- ☞ What are your preliminary conclusions – both about the equity and diversity efforts you hope the program will continue, and about possible changes you would like to make? What are the implications for staff development and/or program development?
- ☞ Is there any consensus in your group about priorities?
- ☞ Are there some issues and concerns that can be addressed fairly quickly? And if so, do you have the leadership and resources to do this?
- ☞ Is there anything that would require further research, strategizing, and consensus-building to address?

# WORKSHEET: Preliminary Program Scan

Strengths

Gaps/Weaknesses

Opportunities

Fears/Challenges