

INTRODUCTION

This workbook is designed to help you look at who and where you are as a community. It also will help you examine the forces that might affect your community's choices in the future. This publication is not intended to be a comprehensive guide, but it can help you think through some of the more important questions you will need to raise. Who are we? Where do we work? How is our population changing? What skills, talents, and resources do we have in our community? What do we like about our community? The answers to these and many other questions form the basis upon which many decisions about our future will be made.

What Do the Numbers Tell Us?

A key step in understanding your community is getting an accurate statistical picture of where you are now. What do the numbers tell you? While numbers cannot capture the complete picture of what is going on in a community at any one time, they can provide useful, objective information about many of the community's characteristics and how they have changed over time. Statistics also can help you compare your community with others across the region, state, or nation. Take a look at the statistics you have for your community. Questions you may want to consider include:

- ✓ How does our community compare with others in the region or the state in terms of population change, income, poverty, education levels, economic structure, and other important characteristics?
- ✓ What are some of the major factors that contribute to the differences between our community and others?
- ✓ Do these numbers tell us anything surprising about our community?
- ✓ How are these numbers reflected in the “reality” we see in the community?

- ✓ Which of these numbers points to community “strengths” we can build upon in future years?
- ✓ Which of these numbers points to “weaknesses” in the community that will need to be addressed in order to realize the vision we have for the community?
- ✓ As we think about these numbers and our community, which ones seem to be related? Do some of these statistics cause or affect others, either positively or negatively?
- ✓ Do we see trends or issues in the community that are not reflected in these numbers?
- ✓ What statistics are not included in the numbers we have? What additional information would you like to see in order to get a more complete picture of the community?

This exercise assumes you are using this workbook as part of a facilitated discussion and that a statistical overview has been provided to you for discussion. If not, and you would like a comprehensive look at a number of important statistics for your community, contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension office in your county.

What Are the Forces and Trends Shaping Our Future?

As you have just seen, a statistical overview is important to understanding your community's present and past. It is equally important, however, to think about the future changes that are likely to occur in our community, the region, the state, and across the nation—and the forces behind these changes. Exploring these possibilities can help you plan and prepare for the future of your community.

Key Questions for Looking at the Future

EXERCISE

1. What major trends or forces of change can be expected in your community during the next 5 to 15 years?

Demographic, Income, and Household Characteristics <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Education <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Health and Health Care <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Environment/Land Use <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Politics <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Citizenship and Values <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Economic <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Technology and Communications <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Transportation <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Other <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Other <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Other <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

2. Of the trends and forces you have just discussed, which are *the most likely* to affect your community during the next 5 to 15 years? Who will be

affected most by the changes, and what resources might the community draw upon to ensure these trends work to the benefit of all?

Trend	Who will be affected most?	Resources
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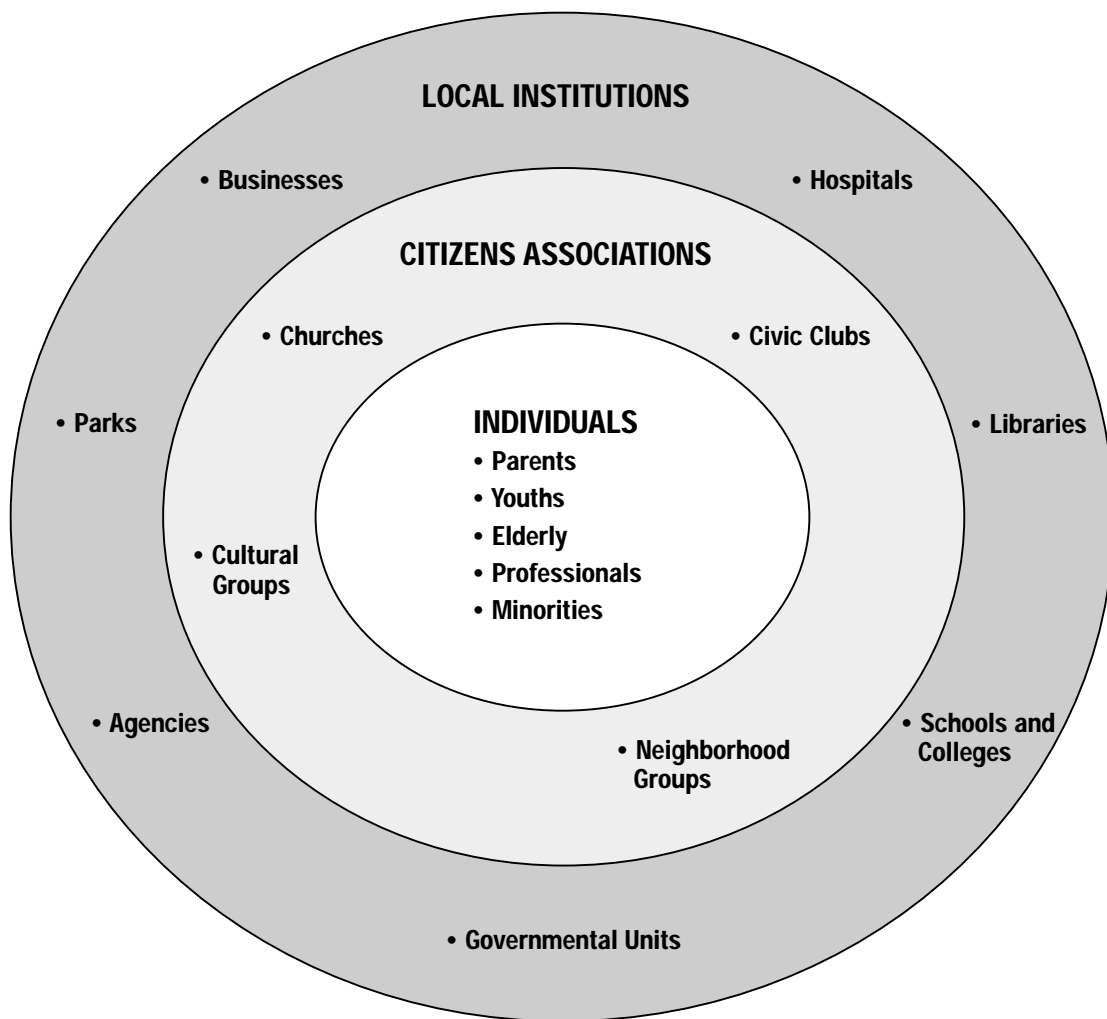
What Resources Do We Have in Our Community?

Because they are the building blocks of much of the work we do in our communities, it is also important to think of the interests, skills, and assets available locally. All communities, even those that we think of as similar, are made up of many different individuals and groups, with many different interests, resources, and skills.

A useful way to look at this is to “map” all the assets in a community. What are the assets, skills, and resources of the individual community residents, citizen associations, and local institutions?

Answering these questions allows us to assess the local resources and address the community’s current and future needs. What almost every community discovers, of course, is that far more resources and assets are available locally than people thought—and that these assets are the foundation of future successes.

Think of communities as series of concentric circles, all of which combine to provide us with the total mix of services, talents, and information we have available to solve local challenges.



Source: Kretzman and McKnight: *Building Communities From the Inside Out*, 1994.

EXERCISE

In order to map your community’s assets, use this table to list the organizations, individuals, and agencies you can think of in your community. If your community has completed a formal application with your Penn State Cooperative Extension office to begin a *Charting* program, much of the information for this exercise can be found there.

Be as specific as possible. In addition, think about each institution’s mission or purpose, whom they serve, and the geographical area they cover. This will help you get a clearer picture of what each institution does and the authority it has. Feel free to use more space as desired, and to include additional categories appropriate to your community.

AGENCY/ORGANIZATION	MISSION/PURPOSE	JURISDICTION/CONSTITUENCY
Units of Government		
Civic Groups/Clubs		
Economic Development		
Human Service Providers		
Health Care Providers		
Churches		
Youth Organizations		
Environmental Groups		
Individual Skills		
Government Agencies		

What Do We Like About Our Community and What Do We Want to Preserve?

Finally, take a moment to talk about what you like about your community. This allows us to establish a foundation for action plans. It also gives us an initial look at things we may want to evaluate as we gauge how effective our community has been over time. Only by discussing what it is we want to preserve, and what community characteristics we treasure, can we truly get a complete picture of where our community is now.

EXERCISE
 List in the categories below the characteristics or attributes of your community that make it a good place to live and that you would like to preserve. Once everyone has had the opportunity to identify the characteristics they feel are important, prioritize the list. Identify the top five in each category.

Demographic, Income, and Household Characteristics <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Education <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Health and Health Care <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Other <hr/> <hr/>	Other <hr/> <hr/>	Other <hr/> <hr/>

