

Community Mapping Guide

NORC programs are built from the ground up to harness the assets of a community. Doing that successfully begins with identifying two broad categories of resources:

- 1) Individuals who live there and the organizations that serve them.
- 2) "Bricks and mortar," the physical infrastructure of the community, including schools, health care facilities, grocery stores, pharmacies, and libraries.

Mapping these resources is a great way to create a visual portrait of community assets. Today, computer technology makes map-making available to almost anyone. **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**, **Global Positioning Systems (GPS)**, and easy-to-access Web-based tools, such as **Google Maps**, have all helped to stimulate "participatory" mapmaking.

The process of making a map is a great way to bring the community together. It helps to interest stakeholders in understanding their communities and empowers them to participate in decision-making processes. And because it tells such an articulate story --- showing where seniors live, how far they have to travel for services, and where the gaps lie -- mapmaking can become a pathway to deeper involvement with a NORC program.

City planning agencies often use GIS technology to map community resources and allow you to access these maps on their websites. The New York City Department of City Planning (www.nyc.gov/dcp), for example, has information by Census tract about the 59 designated community districts in its five boroughs. This includes maps showing how residential and non-residential land is used and where schools, health care services, senior-related facilities, parks, and other key resources are located.

You may also be able to obtain maps from local community development organizations or academic institutions.

But pre-existing maps have limits because they were probably not designed to provide the detailed information that specifically interests NORC program planners. Some city and county planning departments may be willing to work with you to create a more customized map.

Or, you can try the do-it-yourself approach. A good way to start is with Google maps. Visit <http://www.google.com>, click on "maps," and sign in by entering your email address and creating a password. The site, which is currently free, allows you to access maps that other people have created, or to create your own maps from scratch. Its User Guide and Help tools will get you started.

Once you have produced a basic map, you can engage community members to help you locate resources on it. One NORC program, for example, printed out various Google maps and pasted them onto large poster boards. Then, they invited stakeholders -- including senior residents, local businesses, policymakers, and fire officials -- to identify tangible resources in the community and mark them on the map with stick pins and markers.

Eventually, your asset map can also become the basis of a directory of businesses and services in the community that you can publish and share with NORC residents and other stakeholders.