

# Mapping Green Assets

## A Workshop for Identifying Community Strengths

**This tool is available online for download at:**

<http://fieldmuseum.org/explore/department/ecco/downloads>

If you have any questions, concerns, or requests for hard copies of the tools, please contact Jennifer Hirsch at [jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org).

### What are Green Assets?

Green assets are community strengths that can serve as a springboard for engaging residents and organizations in go green initiatives that will simultaneously address an environmental and sociocultural issue. Some green assets can be tangible: community and opinion leaders, organizations and institutions, formal and informal networks, and natural resources. Others are intangible, as with cultural values and practices. What makes them green, as opposed to simply social, cultural, or environmental assets, is that they are somehow related to conserving, caring for, monitoring, advocating for, or educating others about issues related to nature and the environment (including water, land, air, waste, toxics, and energy issues). An unmistakable example of a green asset is a park or a river, while a subtler example could be a school, library, or church that is environmentally aware and active.

### Why Create a Green Asset Map?

Mapping green assets is a vital step in building a greener world. The process of creating the map will bring community members together to explore, visualize, and locate what “going green” means in your particular community. It will also help to reveal social and environmental concerns, such as inadequate housing or lack of open space, and can encourage brainstorming about how these concerns could be addressed through green initiatives.

Additionally, your green asset map can be used to foster greater patronage and support of green businesses, organizations, and spaces. It may prove to be a valuable resource to new residents of the community or to long-time residents who are interested in living greener lives.

## Examples of Green Assets

This workshop encourages you to plot your community's green assets on a map that is tailored to the geography of your area. Below you'll find examples of green assets, placed into different categories. Some of these assets are obviously green, such as forest preserves, garden clubs, or health food stores. Other assets have great potential to be green, such as daycare centers, historical societies, or writing groups. Even if such community groups are not connected to any green projects right now, The Field Museum's work to date suggests that you might want to seek them out to brainstorm about projects that connect environmental work to their social or cultural interests.

When building your own map, think about the types of categories you could use to sort your green assets. The 12 categories below are just examples, to give you an idea for how to organize the data you are collecting through the asset mapping process. Putting your assets into categories will be essential if you wish to create a key or legend to go with your map. While this is not a part of this 2-hour workshop, your library staff could create a legend for your map as part of their follow-up.

Category	Examples
Libraries	School, public, university library working on the Go Green project
Businesses	Goodwill store, vegetarian restaurant, yoga studio, car sharing company, repair shop, bike shop, recycling center, health food store, fair trade store, sustainable food restaurant/caterer
Religious Institutions	Church, synagogue, mosque, or religious leader
Community Organizations	Garden club, farmers' market, block club, ethnic association, Sierra Club chapter, daycare center, YWCA
Gardens	Private yard, community or corporate garden, master gardeners, beekeepers, plant experts
Government Agencies	Historical Society, public transit, aldermen
Public Parks/Park Districts	Park (publicly owned or pocket park), Park District, naturalists
Health Organizations	Clinic, hospital
Schools/Colleges/Universities	Elementary school, community college, active PTA, green student groups
Natural Areas	Forest preserves, waterways, trails, beaches, bird nesting areas, native landscapes
Public Art/Public Space	Murals, town centers, meeting halls, boulevards
Other Green Assets	Local media, writing group, theater, block club

# Preparing for the Workshop

This section provides detailed instructions on how to prepare to hold a “Mapping Green Assets” workshop. It explains what you will need, how to get ready, and who to invite.

## Group Size and Time Needed

- 10-30 participants
- 2 hours

## Space Needed

You will need a room large enough for your group to be comfortable, with wall space to hang large paper and posters. For the Community Walk activity (see below), it is best to hold the workshop at a location that is within walking distance of other meaningful places (e.g. a commercial corridor, parks or natural areas, housing developments, etc.).

## Setting Up the Room

- Arrange chairs in one large circle.
- For the Sharing Stories activity (see below), you will create two concentric circles, adjusted to the number of participants. If you have more than 20 participants and nobody goes out for the Community Walk, then you will need two sets of concentric circles (one for each group).
- Once small group activities are finished, move all chairs back into one large circle.

## Definition of Community

Decide in advance how you will define your community. You may wish to define it by geography, using the boundaries of your town or neighborhood, or by using your organization's boundaries. Alternatively, you may be targeting a particular group of people such as “Seniors Citizens” or “Latinos,” in which case any nearby members of those groups could constitute your target community. The key is to be clear about which definition you will use going into the workshop, know your boundaries for your map, and clearly explain your definition to workshop participants.

## Materials Needed

- 1 large and 1 small note card (or 2 large) and a pen for each participant.
- 1 large Post-it pad for note taking
- 1 piece of large Post-it paper hanging with your own definition of “Green Assets” (put the definition above into your own words). Under it—so it can't be seen at the beginning of the workshop—have another piece of large Post-it paper with some examples of different types of green assets, from obvious to subtle (from the chart above or your own).
- 1-2 sets of Visual Collages and/or 1 set of “What Does Green Mean?” Photos  
Alternatively, you could use photos from your community. To download materials and for more information, visit: <http://fieldmuseum.org/explore/department/ecco/downloads>.
- Copies of the “Community Walk Worksheet” at the end of this guide.
- A map that is approximately the size of standard poster board, 22" x 28".
  - You can print a basic map from Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) or Mapquest (<http://www.mapquest.com>). You will need to have your map printed in a large format.
  - If you would like to use an aerial photo of the community, try the website <http://www.mytopo.com>. You will be able to order an aerial map with major streets clearly marked.

## Facilitation Needs

This workshop works best with two facilitators but can be done with one if the group is small enough. The facilitators should be comfortable giving instructions and guiding discussions among large groups of people.

**Sample Facilitator Questions:** *Where are the parks in your community? How about the gardens or waterways? Who works in them? Are there solar panels or windmills in your community? Who installed them? Which stores provide bicycle racks? Which homes have rain barrels? Which people help connect others to nature?*

## Who to Invite

Remember, almost everyone can help to launch and sustain “green” projects. You can invite anyone of any age—think block club leaders, local merchants, municipal officials, uninvolved residents, students—to help identify green community assets. Make sure to invite a wide array of people to your workshop so that you identify assets beyond the obvious. New thinking is required to solve today’s environmental and social issues—and to garner new ideas, players with different backgrounds need to be involved.

Start your list of invitees with the obvious groups and people: those who work on issues that anyone would consider “green,” such as gardens, environmental restoration, energy efficiency, or recycling. Then, consider people who work on issues that have been identified by The Field Museum as “cross-over” issues that have the potential to link environmental and sociocultural concerns. The Museum’s *New Allies for Nature and Culture* project, completed in 2008, identified five such issues: health/food, economic development, climate change, arts/cultural practices, and youth development (visit <http://gogreenila.info/home> to learn more and download the Project Report under TOOLS/Foster Green Partnerships).

Next, consider inviting local groups or community leaders that seem particularly vibrant or innovative or that you frequently hear about in the news—even if they do not work on anything you would define as “green” right now. Cast your net wide.

Also invite people with far-reaching knowledge of the community. Who are active citizens and respected leaders? Who are the repositories of community history? These stakeholders will be able to significantly advance the asset mapping process without ever leaving their chairs.

Alternatively, you may wish to do “Mapping Green Assets” with groups that already exist or as part of other programs you are running, such as a youth group or a senior genealogy group. Different groups will bring their own areas of expertise, which is why “Mapping Green Assets” is a good exercise to do multiple times with groups of different ages and backgrounds. Keep in mind, though, that there is significant value in having people from different backgrounds interacting with each other in the same room. This will spur them to think about assets that they would not identify in their own groups.

## Prepare to Talk about Next Steps

Finally, you need to think about what the next steps will be after this workshop. What will you do next to build on the map and participants' momentum? See the "Next Steps" section of the Workshop Overview below for some ideas and be ready to present them or others.

## Workshop Overview

This section includes a workshop outline along with detailed instructions for each activity. All of the activities will help participants recognize green assets near them and gain a better understanding of their importance to the community.

The Mapping Green Assets workshop will help you identify and map the green resources in your community. While some of these assets are obviously green, like parks and rivers, others are community assets with the potential to be connected to green initiatives, like schools, block clubs, and daycare centers.

### Sample Agenda: 2-Hour Workshop

Time	Activity
5 minutes	Arrival, Registration
10 minutes	Welcome, Introductions
10 minutes	What are "Green Assets"?
1 hour	Identifying Assets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outside Activity: Community Walk</li><li>• Inside Activity: Sharing Stories</li></ul>
25 minutes	Large Group Reconvenes – Add Assets to Map
10 minutes	Next Steps

### Arrival, Registration (5 min.)

- Welcome participants as they arrive.
- Make sure everyone signs in. Capture their contact information for future follow-up.
- Give them 1 large and 1 small note card and a pen. While they are waiting, ask them to read the definition of "Green Assets" and, on the small note card, jot down a few examples of green assets in the community and their lives.

## Welcome, Introductions (10 min.)

- Explain the purpose of the workshop.
- Invite participants to share their names and why they are here or, alternatively, the one word that comes to mind when they hear “green.”
- Review the agenda and the goal of each activity.

## What are “Green Assets”? (10 min.)

- Present your definition of “green assets,” in your own words.
- Ask a few participants to share some green assets in the community and their lives.

## Identifying Assets Activities: Community Walk or Sharing Stories (1 hr)

Explain that participants will now divide into two groups. Both groups will be identifying green community assets. One group will go on an asset discovery tour in the community, while the other will share stories that bridge nature and community. Allow participants to select their own groups, yet balance them out as needed. *Note: If the weather is bad, have both groups stay inside for “Sharing Stories.”*

## Community Walk Activity

- Give each participant the “Community Walk Worksheet” at the end of this guide and review it together. Instruct them to fill out this worksheet during their walk, and ask if they have questions.
- Tell participants to partner with at least one other person.
- Review with participants the examples of “green assets” that you wrote down on butcher paper. Remind them to think beyond the obvious.
- Explain the boundaries of the walk, and give the exact time that everyone will need to return.
- Send the teams off to discover green assets! Give your cell phone in case it's needed. Alternatively you may wish to walk together as a group.

Note: Make sure your workshop is held in an area that is good for walking. Choose a community area that is safe and near other green assets. Alternatively, if participants are adults, you may choose to have them do a Community Drive or Bike.

## Sharing Stories Activity

### 5 Minute Introduction

- Form two concentric circles. Instruct half of the group to sit on the inside circle to be story tellers and half to sit on the outside circle to be story collectors.
- Place the Visual Collages in the center of the inner circle, with enough pictures to engage all the story tellers.
- Ask the story tellers: Which of these images reminds you of something you do in the community? Do any of the pictures look like things you have seen others in the community doing?

### 15 Minute Story Sharing

- Invite the story tellers to share their answers, taking turns as they explain the practices and people they associate with the images. Make sure to allow time for follow-up questions and conversation.
- As the story tellers share, have the story collectors take notes on their large note cards of any assets they hear in the stories, such as people like bike riders or farmers, natural areas like forest preserves or farms, or other resources like rain barrels and solar panels. They can also note intangible assets, such as values of frugality, family traditions of gardening, or cultural practices of sharing or caring for the land.

### 10 Minute Reflection

- Have the story collectors share what they wrote on their note cards with the larger group.
- Are the story collectors naming clear assets? If not, encourage other participants to help them rethink the stories they heard. Ask the group critical questions, examining the individuals, groups, places, actions, values, and resources that appeared in people's stories. Use every chance you get to help participants think through local green assets they have not yet identified or talked about yet. For example, if someone talks about a farm they grew up on in another state, use this as an opportunity to ask about the local farmers in the area, where participants get their food, and/or whether they know the farmers in their region.
- Take notes on butcher paper of all the assets that get shared. Wherever possible, write down their exact locations, providing an address where able.

### 30 Minutes: Switch Roles

- Have the people in the outside circle move to the inside circle, and vice versa, so that story collectors and story tellers all change roles. Go through each of the steps above, using the same allotted times.



Note: If you decide to skip Community Walk and have more than 20 participants for Sharing Stories, you will need to divide into two groups. Each group will need its own facilitator.

### **Large Group Reconvenes—Add Assets to Map (25 min.)**

- Bring both groups back together, with everyone sitting in one large circle again.
- Ensure that the Community Walkers have their worksheets and story collectors have their notes.
- Allow time for participants from each of the small groups to report on what they learned:
  - Ask them to share specific assets they identified and their locations in the community (exact or approximate).
  - As each asset and location is named, write it on a poster board for all to see.
- Transfer this list onto a large map of your community area:
  - One by one find the asset locations on the community map.
  - Mark and label each location, using either a drawing or a short description to explain the type of asset at the location in question.
  - If an asset is expansive – like a river or a train line – do your best to plot the way this asset runs throughout your community, noting its starting and end points.
- To map intangible assets—e.g., a cultural tradition of frugality—you have a few options. If the asset applies to a particular part of town, you can plot it in the general vicinity. For example, if someone said that the Latino community constantly shares and re-purposes goods, and there is a large Latino community living in one section of the community, you can plot the asset in that area. Additionally or alternatively, you can make a list of intangible assets and represent them in other ways if you choose to display the map (see “Next Steps” below), for example through photos.

### **Next Steps (10 min.)**

Asset mapping is an ongoing process. Communities are constantly changing, and there is always more to discover about skills and strengths. Here are some ideas for maintaining the momentum you’ll generate and for using your “Green Asset Map” to continue engaging community members around the concept of “green” and to develop green community project ideas. During the final 10 minutes of your workshop, explain which of these next steps or others you will be doing.

1. Display your physical map as an interactive exhibit: Explain to the group that you will hang your physical map in a publicly accessible place (like your lobby). Make it an interactive exhibit by displaying alongside it your definition of “Green Assets” (or an

updated definition based on the workshop discussions) as well as instructions and materials for library customers to contribute to it. You may want to consider collaborating with a subset of workshop participants to create a more extensive exhibit of photos, stories, or local artwork related to the green assets plotted on the map. Consider having the exhibit travel around the community for display at some of the green locations plotted on the map.

2. Encourage and support participants to identify more green assets: Challenge participants to contribute to the green asset map and explain that you can help to add any new assets they discover. Invite them to explore new areas of the community in search of green assets. What green community strengths can they observe at work? On their blocks? Or in school? Or if participants believe they can collect more stories to reveal green assets, point them toward the storytelling tools on the Go Green website and find out what additional support they need.  
Also consider offering incentives, like a referral program. What could your organizations offer participants who add more assets or draw in others? Gift certificates to the local gardening store for seeds? Community dinners? Discounts to local shops or restaurants? Talk to local businesses identified and displayed on the map to see what donations they might be willing to make.
3. Host More Workshops: You could convene this same group again and continue to refine the map, convene other groups to build on it, or do this mapping workshop as part of another continuing program you already run. This would broaden the diversity and types of green assets identified.
4. Promote Green Assets: Turn your asset map into an attractive, well-designed brochure or handout to print and distribute to all of the places named as green assets. Businesses like coffee shops, the tourism bureau, and retail stores could offer copies to their patrons. The presence of the map online and the desire for additional input could be advertised throughout the community.
5. Put Your Map Online: There are a number of programs you can use to put your asset map online. You can go to <http://www.greenmap.org>, to add your assets to a green map that spans the globe. You can create a map just for your community through <http://www.maps.google.com> or <http://www.communitywalk.com>.

Whatever next steps you choose, the key for workshop participants is to inspire them to maintain the exploration they began in this workshop and to provide them the support they will need to be successful. As more residents learn to identify their local assets, they will take on more value and a powerful foundation will be laid for building a greener community.

## Conclusion: Climbing the Ladder to Green

Asset mapping identifies resources, people, and organizations that can be leveraged to achieve targeted community goals. Yet building greener communities requires that we go beyond simple identification. We must proactively improve the ways that green assets are seen and used and increase the number of green assets in our communities. To do this we must change the ways we work with others.

The Field Museum encourages organizations to “climb the ladder to green” by building on each activity to create a strategic go green plan for your community. You can use this map and process to plan green storytelling and partnerships activities. The assets identified through this workshop will help you determine who to invite and what kinds of stories or issues you might want to focus on.

The “Foster Green Partnerships” workshop provides an opportunity for diverse community organizations and leaders to forge new relationships that can leverage green assets to address community issues (information and downloadable workshop materials, can be found at <http://fieldmuseum.org/explore/departments/ecco/downloads>). Storytelling activities will help you delve more deeply into particular issues that arose during asset mapping and learn how they connect to a broader swath of the community. Visit <http://www.gogreenila.info/storytelling> for more information and to download Storytelling workshop materials. Though the tools on this site are tailored to libraries, they can be used by any organization.

**Closing Questions:** *Once your green assets have been identified, how can you bring them into more creative relationships with each other? Which people need to be connected to whom or to what? Which institutions need to be working together around which issues? How can the assets you've identified be used to improve the local food system? To promote alternative transportation like biking? Or to help conserve water and energy in people's homes? Which of the organizations you identified could help to make such projects a success?*