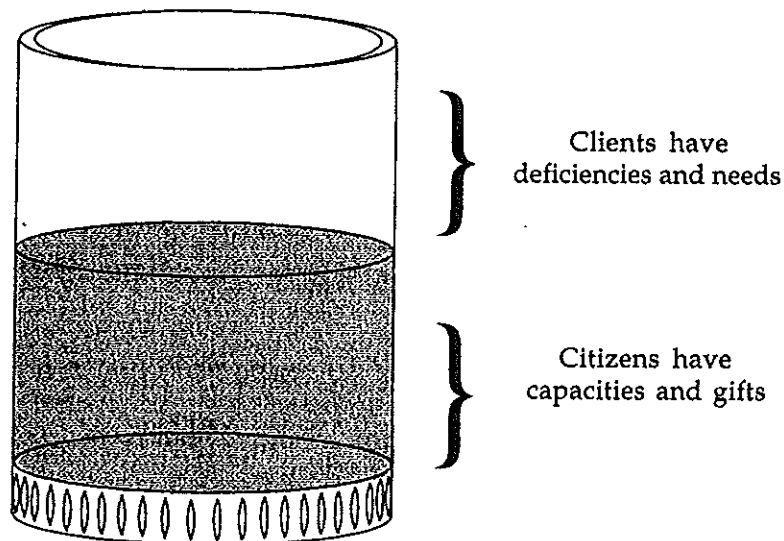


**Community Building
Workbook**
(Kretzman and McKnight, 1997)

**CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION**

This guide is written for people working in communities and struggling to understand how best to capture the potential of all citizens. Every single person has capacities, abilities, and gifts, and the quality of an individual life in part depends on the extent to which these capacities are used, abilities expressed, and gifts given. Just as individual lives are enhanced by the opportunity to give, communities are made stronger when residents use their full potential by directing their capacities toward the well-being of the neighborhood.

As communities attempt to build a healthy future, they must often struggle against a development perspective that encourages them to see only their needs and deficiencies. But most communities have already experienced what happens when they focus solely on what is missing in their community, and they know that this approach does not produce positive results. In fact every community has needs, problems, and deficiencies; the choice for community groups is whether that is all they want to focus on. Like a glass of water filled to the middle which can be viewed as either half empty or half



full, a community can be seen as a half-empty place comprised of clients with needs and deficiencies, or as a place half full of citizens with capacities and gifts to give.

One critical part of building a healthy community is finding out what individual capacities each resident possesses. Collectively, these individual capacities represent an important asset for the community. They comprise a powerful "tool" that can be used to address problems, promote growth, and enhance the quality of local life. The less a community knows about itself and its citizens' capacities, the easier it is to fall into a pattern of seeing the community and its people only through a "needs" perspective. The more a community becomes familiar with itself and its citizens, the more obvious it becomes that what is good about a community far outweighs whatever needs it may have. Additionally, it becomes clear that the challenges a community faces can be addressed most effectively by using the capacities that already exist there, rather than looking somewhere else for answers.

What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide was developed to report how a number of community groups used an asset-based approach in their community-building efforts, and how they developed and implemented a capacity inventory project through which they identified and mobilized the gifts and skills of local people. The asset-based community-building approach illustrated in this guide was developed by John McKnight and John Kretzmann and presented in their manual, Building Communities From the Inside Out. That book contains a single example of an individual capacity inventory. This guide introduces a much wider variety of inventories, used in different kinds of communities for many different community-building purposes.

Who should use this guide?

Groups and organizations of all kinds have used the asset-based approach in their community-building efforts. The range of groups who have developed and used a capacity inventory include:

- *Large and small* organizations ranging from government entities with many partners, to small neighborhood groups with just a few members.
- Formal organizations and *informal* collections of community residents.
- Groups addressing a *variety of issues*, such as health, education, economic development, cultural enhancement, youth development, etc.
- *Rural* groups and *urban* groups.
- *Funded* groups and groups who operate with *volunteers*.

Any kind of group or organization can adapt the capacity inventory process for use in their own particular community-building efforts. The point is to shift the focus from community needs to community capacities, and the capacity inventory allows an organization to do just that by asking about the personal "gifts" that individuals can contribute toward building their community:

- What are the *skills* they can put to work?
- What are the *abilities* and *talents* they can share?
- What are the *experiences* from which they have learned?
- What are the *interests* and *dreams* they would like to pursue?

Once collected, the aggregate information forms a knowledge base about local capacities that can be mobilized toward community building. These powerful human resources can be directed toward:

- Promoting economic growth, local enterprises, and job connections.
- Organizing local community-building activities and projects.
- Showcasing local talents, and celebrating community.
- Facilitating citizen action around critical issues.
- Rebuilding relationships, trust, and "social capital."

More about the capacities communities discover.

Community organizations are almost always surprised by the extent of the individual capacities they find as a result of doing a capacity inventory. Individuals possess many more capacities than are apparent without asking, because most people do not publicize their individual capacities beyond listing them on a resume, using them in the voluntary work they do, or sharing them with immediate family members. The leader of one community organization in rural California expresses the general astonishment shared by most groups who have started to discover the extent of the gifts of local people through the use of the capacity inventory:

We never guessed how much we would find! People checked off so many things they could offer to each other!

In fact, what all community groups discover through the capacity inventory process is that every community resident possesses an extensive array of individual capacities. The capacities that have been discovered by most groups come in the form of:

- **Skills** in a wide range of categories, including creative skills, office and retail skills, service-related skills, caregiving skills, maintenance and repair skills, construction skills, and many more.
- **Abilities and talents** including art, story-telling, crafts, gardening, teaching, sports, political interest, organizing, volunteering, and more.
- **Interests** such as the sharing of skills, enthusiasm for learning and exploring new ideas, participating in a new activity.
- **Experiences** such as travel experiences, educational, or life experiences that give the individual a unique perspective to share.

Community building results: What local capacities can produce.

Once discovered, these capacities can be mobilized towards all sorts of community-building projects. The six community organizations whose experiences we feature here each found an enormous range of capacities among their local residents and successfully mobilized them into building strong local programs. After identifying the issues upon which they wanted to focus, these organizations used the issues as opportunities for local people to utilize their capacities and give their gifts.

In every case, these organizations found that using the capacity inventory as a community-development tool produced both *tangible* and *intangible* results. Both are important; both contribute to the overall well-being of a community.

Tangible results generally take the form of specific community-building or economic development activities that emerge out of the increased awareness of residents and organizations about their own capacity to act effectively.

Here are examples of some tangible results reported by community groups who have conducted an individual capacity inventory among local residents.

Economic development:

- Linking existing businesses with new markets.
- Making employers aware of the skills of potential employees in the community.
- Sponsorship of the start-up of a catering business.

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- Producing a community income and balance sheet.
 - Establishing an advisory group for a primary business corridor.
 - Showcasing the talents of local start-up businesses at a fund-raiser.
 - Mobilizing community creative talent to produce a community celebration and arts fair.
 - Raising funds for community projects.
 - Establishing new public transportation routes to enable isolated consumers to patronize local businesses.
 - Increasing availability of critical resources such as child or respite care.
 - Identifying retirees in the community who can assist local groups with professional expertise.
 - Identifying opportunities for local employment so that local residents can work within the local economy.

Organizing people to address issues:

- Identifying new participants for community organizations and local issue campaigns.
- Organizing resident management groups.
- Establishing a senior center.
- Starting a food bank that incorporates homebound disabled people and seniors in its management structure.
- Establishing a network of local people to supervise visitations among family members separated by child and family service agencies.
- Organizing a neighborhood skills center where participants decide what will be taught.

Building trust and "social capital" through connections and linkages:

- Creating intergenerational linkages between elders and children.
- Connecting two troubled teens in different parts of the country who now share a supportive "pen-pal" relationship over the internet.
- Identification of a homebound man with computer expertise who can tutor young students.
- Connecting families of children with mental illnesses so they can jointly advocate for their children.
- Linking a man who lost everything in a fire to an advocate who could assist him in the process of rebuilding his life.
- Creating supportive links among families with problems.
- Providing opportunities for people to volunteer to share with others.

Civic involvement:

- Registering voters and providing transportation to polling places.
- Creating volunteer advocacy networks for assisting families through interactions with institutions and agencies.
- Involving more adults in youth activities such as sports teams or clubs.
- Monitoring by residents of an urban greenspace project.
- Identifying neighborhood people who can act as spokespeople on issues of concern to community members.
- Opening opportunities for volunteer action for the benefit of the community.

From the examples you can see that tangible results can be small-scale or large-scale, and can involve relationship building among just a few individuals with common interests, or multiple entities ranging from individual residents to large institutions. The leader of one community organization that has grown over many years into a major community development corporation shares the pride he feels in the group's accomplishments:

We started out as a small group just trying to prevent the total destruction of our community by outside developers and city agencies. Now we are about to embark on the largest manufacturing project to be undertaken in the city of New York in 50 years, in which we will employ more than 1,500 local residents!

Intangible results are sometimes harder to identify, but are certainly no less important. Members of the communities engaged in the asset-based development process often speak about the positive perspective that nearly everyone develops as a result of gathering and working with individual capacities. Intangible results are usually those differences in feelings and attitudes that result from seeing the community and its members in a new way--as a collection of capacities rather than a set of needs.

Here are some examples of intangible results reported by residents who have engaged in an individual capacity inventory.

- Community spirit and pride are enhanced.
- Individuals see themselves differently--as citizens with the capacity and authority to ask questions, and the power and ability to initiate and carry out the changes they desire.

- Community members previously identified only by their problems, for example, "too old," "too young," "too poor," suddenly are viewed as contributing members of the community.
- Community members who once looked around their neighborhood and saw only problems, now see the limitless possibilities that exist.
- People are more willing to reach out to their neighbors, get to know them, and begin to build relationships that depend only upon individual trust and caring, rather than always asking outsiders for help.
- Community residents develop a new sense of hope about themselves and their future, and increased confidence about and their ability to build a better life.

One woman's personal change exemplifies many of the intangible results we heard about:

I've lived in this neighborhood a long time and I always used a post office box instead of my address. I didn't want people to know where I was from because I was embarrassed. Since doing the survey and all of us see how many great people, places, and resources we have here, I feel different. We have a lot going for us. I feel proud of our neighborhood and how we are the ones making things happen. Now I use my own address.

When we say "building *community* from the inside out" we are referring to both tangible and intangible outcomes that result from the community building process. Believing in oneself and one's neighbors and the individual and collective ability to accomplish something worthwhile is just as important as the concrete outcome of actually starting a new enterprise. In fact, they are reverse sides of the same accomplishment. Believing in the capacity to accomplish goals is necessary before concrete goals can be successfully achieved.

Remember, successful community building depends on both:

- **Building a belief in the capacities of local people, and**
- **Mobilizing their capacities to produce concrete outcomes.**

The rest of this guide is presented in three parts. The remainder of Chapter One introduces the six organizations whose experiences are featured in this guide. Chapter Two is devoted to sharing the experiences of these community groups as they incorporated an individual capacity inventory into their community-building plan. Chapter Three offers tips and lessons learned by these organizations about how to successfully conduct an inventory of the capacities of local residents. Chapter Four briefly introduces some other resources for helping build communities from the inside out, including the Neighborhood Economic Series, a set of three workbooks that each explain a step-by-step process for accomplishing a specific component of whole-community economic mobilization. The Appendix provides additional examples of successful individual capacity inventories adapted and used by still other organizations.

The six community groups featured in Chapter 2 succeeded both in building a belief in the capacities of local residents, and in mobilizing these capacities to produce concrete community-building outcomes. Results were achieved when individual residents began to see themselves as the core ingredients in problem solving related to their own and others concerns. In each case committing to conduct a capacity inventory, designing the questions, gathering the information, and then assessing how to connect individuals and create strong relationships became the very process of community building. The information shared by these groups comes directly from their citizen/members and includes what they have learned and accomplished from using an asset-based approach.

The organizations featured here are unique in many ways. We've tried to include organizations representing different kinds of membership, different kinds of places, and different styles of organizing. For each group we attempt to answer each of the following questions:

- Who are the *members* of this organization? How many are there? Are they individuals or is the group a consortium of associations or organizations?
- What is the organization's *purpose*? Why did they come together and what are they trying to accomplish?
- How did they go about *designing* their capacity inventory? How did they translate their ideas into a set of inventory questions?
- How did they go about *conducting* their capacity inventory? Were local residents involved in every phase of the project?

- How are they *using* the information they learned? In what concrete ways are the capacities of individuals being incorporated in community-building efforts?

While each organization may be different along some of these dimensions, the one thing each and every organization shares is a commitment to seeing themselves and their members as a collection of assets and capacities and to building on their internal resources. The capacity inventory developed by each one is incorporated into their individual stories so that you will be able to see how each organization tailored their inventory to meet their specific needs. It should be noted that each of these groups has continued to evolve since this document was prepared, and they are developing new ways of mobilizing the capacities of local citizens.

Introduction to the community organizations.

- **The Family Support Network (FSN)** is made up of families whose focus is to promote connections for the purpose of resource sharing, advocacy, and mutual support. They are located in the Seattle area, and their membership currently includes 150 families. FSN uses volunteers from among the membership to conduct an individual capacity inventory, to maintain a databank of the capacities of local families, and to facilitate an exchange of resources among its members. The organization was originally started by a working mother who realized that just as she herself needed help to keep up with the routine demands of daily life, so did other families.
- **Interfaith Action** is a church-based community organization in Minneapolis. Among its activities the 25 member churches focus on economic development in low-income neighborhoods, which they pursue through their own community development corporation. Interfaith Action currently counts as members more than 500 families. The organization uses church volunteers to distribute their capacity inventory, which is primarily focused on discovering the economic capacities among its member families. Originally formed to consolidate local power in response to discriminatory practices by institutions in their community, the group subsequently decided to incorporate an asset-based perspective into their development efforts.
- **The Sierra County Children's Health Collaborative (SCCHC)** is a network of organizations and individuals whose purpose is working together to find ways to promote community health by focusing on the health of their children. SCCHC is a rural organization serving a sparsely populated, mountainous county covering 900 square miles in California.

They help people meet in settings in which they can share their capacities to improve the nutritional, emotional, physical, spiritual, and economic health of children and families. SCCHC originally formed in response to a funder's Request for Proposals that called for an agenda for community action around health issues.

- **The Neighborhood Pride Team (NPT)** is an organization whose membership is comprised of formerly isolated individuals whose purpose is discovering their individual and collective strengths and using these strengths for community problem solving, especially in terms of economic development. NPT is located in a struggling and isolated Portland neighborhood, and its membership currently includes 60 women and 7 men. Individual members conduct a capacity inventory among their neighbors and then work to link people with similar interests to undertake activities for creating local economic opportunities, promoting self esteem, and developing careers. Originally organized with a general goal of reducing the isolation of the families living in the economically disadvantaged area, NPT has created a vision that promotes pride, economic development, and hope for the future.
- **The Mutual Partnerships Coalition (MPC)** is made up of large and small groups ranging from health maintenance organizations to churches. Their purpose is to work together toward community well-being by bringing youth and the elderly into intergenerational networks that focus on reducing isolation and improving health. A Seattle group, MPC has five member organizations representing many individuals. Each member group employs a "community guide," an individual who conducts capacity inventories among local residents and facilitates linkages among those individuals whose needs and interests correspond. The MPC coalition originally came together to respond to a challenge from a large foundation to develop community health projects that would promote stronger communities.
- **Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association (BK)** is a large, not-for-profit community development corporation whose purpose is building community through activities in housing, economic development, and education. BK is an urban organization located and serving residents in the South Bronx. BK conducts a capacity inventory among residents in order to mobilize them in their many economic development and housing management efforts. The organization originally started as a community response to the activities of several institutions who were moving to displace local residents. BK is currently responsible for the largest new manufacturing project to be undertaken in New York City in 50 years, and plans to employ at least 1,500 local residents in this development effort.

The organizations featured in this guide and the stories they share represent just a few of the creative ways that community groups around the country are making the asset-based development process work for them. Each of these organizations has taken the idea of building communities from the inside out and applied it to their own particular circumstances and settings. Each one has taken the original capacity inventory design and modified it so that it is able to capture the kind of specific information about local residents they feel will be most useful in the asset-mobilization project they have designed for themselves and their community.

No two of the organizations featured here are exactly alike, although they each share at least one or two characteristics with one or more of the other groups.

Membership

- The membership of the Family Support Network and the Neighborhood Pride Team are made up primarily of individuals living in neighborhoods; Interfaith Action's membership includes families affiliated with 25 churches across the larger metropolitan area; the Sierra County Children's Health Collaborative, the Mutual Partnerships Coalition, and the Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association have a combination of individual, organizational, and institutional members.

Location

- Banana Kelly, Interfaith Action, and the Mutual Partnerships Coalition are urban organizations, while the Sierra County Children's Health Collaborative is a rural group, and the Family Support Network and the Neighborhood Pride Team are located in small neighborhoods situated in larger urban centers.

Surveyors

- The Neighborhood Pride Team, the Family Support Network, and Interfaith Action use volunteers to conduct their capacity inventory; the Sierra County Children's Health Collaborative uses local schools to distribute the inventory; member groups in the Mutual Partnerships Coalition hire community guides who conduct the inventory among local residents; and Banana Kelly conducts the inventory among new residents in the buildings they manage and among local people who come into contact with any one of their sub-groups.

Uses and results

- Interfaith Action, Banana Kelly, and the Mutual Partnerships Coalition use the capacity inventory as the basis for large- and small-scale local economic development projects; The Sierra County Children's Health Collaborative and the Family Support Network use the capacity inventory as the basis for improving the general health of community members by creating and expanding networks of local people who can exchange resources with one another; and the Neighborhood Pride Team uses the capacity inventory for both expanding relationships and creating job and career opportunities.

The remainder of this guide explores the organizations and their goals in more depth, explains the way they made use of the asset-based approach, and shares some of the lessons they learned in the process of building community from the inside out. In addition, each story includes a reproduction of the actual capacity inventory used by the different groups. For examples of capacity inventories developed by groups other than those featured in this guide, please refer to the Appendix where five more unique examples are provided.

Please note that while we have attempted to reproduce each of the inventories as exactly as possible, in the interest of space we have eliminated most of the blank lines that each group originally included for entering the answers provided by the individuals.

CHAPTER TWO

SHARING THE EXPERIENCE

This chapter will report the experiences of six very different communities, each of which has created its own tools and methods of mapping and mobilizing the capacities of local residents. Each of these stories contains valuable lessons for community builders everywhere.

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

An urban network of families working together on a voluntary basis to promote family-based connections for the purpose of resource sharing and mutual support

The Family Support Network (FSN) is made up of families who joined together to create people-to-people connections that allow individuals and families to support one another. Its members believe that it is a good system for building community. FSN is about sharing and caring, and the network focuses on peer support. Network meetings connect people who ordinarily would not be in relationship, for example, a homeless man and a judge. The Family Support Network provides a way for families to increase their participation in the everyday life of their community.

The Family Support Network is a "ramp into everyday life," a thriving environment where building community happens through a caring, lively, and fun process of neighbor-to-neighbor exchange. Belonging to the network is like being part of a big extended family. Members gather for fun, companionship, support, and when needed, help from their neighbors. The FSN connects people together by phone, e-mail, or personal contact. Neighborhood gatherings are offered on a regular basis to provide people in the community a place to meet, share a meal and discuss various topics of interest. Local agencies utilize the FSN to enhance support services to their clients and help them be more self-sufficient. Based in the Seattle area, FSN's membership includes 250 families from across America.

How does the network function?

Each individual or family completes a registration form which includes a brief capacity inventory. Those with computers can register through the FSN website which immediately transfers the information directly into the FSN

Databank. The databank provides the basis for all communication, organizing, and matching of network members. Each family in the network has agreed to share their gifts and resources with other families and in return receive access to the gifts and resources of other families. All families agree to participate on a regular basis to keep the connections going among all members. A packed and informative newsletter keeps the members informed of upcoming activities and opportunities for involvement.

The FSN is an informal organization and is operated totally by volunteers. A variety of jobs are available, each one considered an integral part of the functioning network.

- *Good Neighbors* include all the members of the network. They connect with their neighbors--other network members--whenever a reason arises. People become good neighbors by filling out a capacity inventory and agreeing to become part of the network of supportive families. Recently, the FSN capacity inventory has been used to sign up long-distance Good Neighbors on the FSN website.
- *Family Advocates* participate in a training course in order to be prepared to advocate for and support member families when they are dealing with bureaucracies or systems with which they may be unfamiliar, for example, health care providers, courts, social workers, or police. They use their skills to help families navigate these systems, and may accompany families who have meetings with one of these entities.
- *Community Connectors* are neighbors who use the database to connect people to others in the community in order to match requests, interests, or needs. Community Connectors track the inventory data and use their familiarity with the gifts and capacities of the network members to promote and facilitate the most appropriate connections.
- *FSN Partners* are businesses who contribute cash, time, expertise, services, and equipment to the FSN community networking activities.

The Family Support Network has a wonderful track record of creating useful and valuable relationships. In 1995, out of 1,000 requests for connections, 96% resulted in successful connections with another member of the community. These matches were based on requests such as child care, respite care, providing transportation, negotiating debt payments, supervising child protection visits, sheltering fire victims, locating housing, and advocating for families with large bureaucracies. In addition, many connections were made for the simple purpose of connecting people with similar interests or in

response to the desire of members to share their gifts and capacities with other members of the network. The FSN volunteers find that almost every need, interest, or request can be matched by another Good Neighbor or Family Advocate in the network.

The Family Support Network also offers its members several kinds of activities in which they can become involved in order to share their individual gifts and capacities.

- *Family activities* encourage members to get together for fun with neighbors and friends. FSN sponsors picnics, trips to the movies, ballgames, and camp-outs for its members.
- *Neighborhood Gatherings* allow members to get together for supportive talk about family issues--including divorce, mental health, family violence, and disruptive behavior--with other families facing the same situation.

The Family Support Network was started by a working mother with four children who felt she needed help to keep up with all the demands made upon her in her life. Her personal need for a community of supportive people led to the development of a support network of families in her area that were experiencing similar stress and isolation. This woman's goal for the last 10 years has been to connect more neighbors to neighbors for the purpose of helping one another.

Family Support Network success stories

- A mother with a child with serious physical disabilities was having trouble getting the school to provide adequate resources. An FSN Family Advocate was able to assist the mother to get the school to meet her demands for her child's well being. As a result of this connection, a friendship was formed between the two women and when the Family Advocate's child became aggressive at home, the mother was able to help out by taking the child for the weekend. The Family Advocate's child became a great support for the disabled child, and the two families continue in a nurturing relationship with one another.
- An elderly woman, concerned about health care issues, was connected with an isolated mother whose son had behavior problems. Connecting these two women has resulted in the mother helping the older woman with her health care difficulties; the older woman assisting with caring for the son; and the development of a solid friendship between two formerly isolated individuals.

- A family living in public housing needed some shelves in their apartment. Their case worker connected them with the Family Support Network, who found people with the tools, skills, and materials that were necessary to build the shelves without delay.
- An e-mail connection was created between two troubled teenagers in different parts of the country. An advice and pen-pal relationship has developed.

The Family Support Network's individual capacity inventory is fairly short and asks questions about the abilities and interests of the individual, their expertise, what outdoor and indoor activities they have experience doing, and what resources they have that they would be willing to share with other members of the community.