

MAPPING OUT CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE PRACTICE

ARTPLACE

spire + base

MAPPING OUT CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU'RE JUST GETTING STARTED

More and more, communities around the world are turning to cultural asset mapping as a key component of their local revitalization strategy.

By getting a better sense of their arts and cultural assets, communities are better positioned to build prosperity around resources that they already enjoy. Fortunately, there are a lot of really talented consultants working in the field of cultural asset mapping – people who can help you think through what can sometimes be a complicated process.

But to know how best to engage a consultant – and what their scope of work should be – it's helpful to have at least a broad understanding of what cultural asset mapping is and how it works. In reality, cultural asset mapping is more than one, single approach. Communities carry out asset mapping projects for a variety of reasons, using a variety of approaches, relying on a variety of information sources and engaging a variety of participants.

In a word, it's big. And because it's big, any exploration of the practice can benefit from the expertise of a lot of different people – people who can bring perspectives from community arts, community development, government and academia.

That's how we built this resource guide. We reached out to leading experts in cultural asset mapping and compiled advice from 62 individuals working at the forefront of this field. In this series, we'll be outlining what they had to share. We've included their key recommendations, including:

- Developing a mission focus for your cultural asset mapping project, one contextualized in local priorities.
- Building time into your process for community engagement, with participation from both people who work in the arts and those that do not.
- Making sure that the mapping process is meaningful in and of itself – even before you get to acting on the information that comes out of it.

Opposite that kind of practical advice, we've also included lots of real-life examples and resources that can help you put these ideas into practice, whether you're trying to learn about a particular aspect of cultural asset mapping or just want to get a general sense of how it's done.

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING IS

Before we dig into our 62 experts' advice on cultural asset mapping, it's probably worthwhile to spend a few minutes looking at what cultural asset mapping is.

It's been defined different ways in different places, but for our purposes, we're using this working definition: "Any process by which a community works to identify their arts and cultural assets, including people, places, events and/or real estate."

That gives us some general parameters for what we're talking about, but clearly a broad set of projects could fit within that definition. Further complicating things, many projects that *do* fit that definition don't label themselves as cultural asset mapping. A community could call it asset mapping or an asset inventory or an arts census. Cultural asset mapping can also be one component of a larger effort. You might see it come out of a local storytelling initiative, or it might serve as a key component of a community master plan, or it could be one part of an initiative focused on a particular community priority, like health or public transit.

The fact that cultural asset mapping gets called a lot of different things and shows up a lot of different places makes it a bit trickier to find resources and examples of the practice. It can even make it difficult to determine if some form of cultural asset mapping has already taken place in your community in the past.

And when we look closer at the idea of what's cultural, what's an asset and what's mapping – well, things can get even murkier.

Cultural

It can be hard to define what's cultural and what isn't. When we think about a community's culture – what makes it a place with a distinct, shared identity – it's obvious that a lot of things contribute to that. Community culture often includes elements that are clearly related to the arts – but that's not always the case. Our culture can be defined by humanities, heritage, history, traditions, landscape, food, architecture, language ... It's all those different elements working together that make places special and meaningful.

Even when we're trying to focus on arts assets specifically, that can be a challenge. What we consider to be an arts organization might not call itself one, and people who create art or lead arts programming might not call themselves artists.

Further complicating things, there are a lot of arts-based or cultural approaches to getting people engaged in mapping out assets. So in some cases, people may be referring to mapping out cultural assets, and in other cases, they may be talking about taking cultural approaches to mapping out assets more broadly.

All of this ambiguity in what makes something “cultural” can make it difficult to get a sense of the full range of cultural assets in our communities.

Asset

“Asset” can be a tricky term, too. By definition, it’s something that’s valuable or useful in some way to a community. But obviously, not everyone within a community is going to universally value things in the same way. To one person, a vacant historic theater might be very clearly a cultural asset. To another, it might just be a nuisance property.

“People think of assets differently. For example, while I may think it’s great to have a park near my house, others may think it’s a haven for crime. So defining assets is difficult.”

– Joanna Woronkiewicz,
Assistant Professor, School of Public and
Environmental Affairs, Indiana University

It’s all in what each of us individually believe is of use to our community – and how those individual assessments add up into what we value collectively.

Take this example. In 2014, Norwich City Council was exploring a skateboard ban in parts of its city center. At least part of their concern was how the activity might impact places like public gardens and a war memorial. The potential ban prompted an ecologist – an architect and an economic geographer, working together as the **Accidental Youth Club** – to lead Norwich skateboarders in mapping out assets from a youth perspective. It’s a perfect example of how different people value things in our communities through different lenses ... and it speaks to why even agreeing on what an asset is can be complicated.

Mapping

On its surface, “mapping” seems like a pretty straight-forward concept. Something’s either a map or it isn’t. However, when people talk about cultural asset mapping, they’re quite often talking about mapping in the most general sense of the word, pointing to basically any method by which a community compiles data about what its cultural assets are.

The vast majority of cultural asset mapping projects *do* involve some kind of mapping in the sense that we typically think about it – using maps as a way to surface information about cultural assets or using maps to display the information that’s collection. That being said, it’s entirely possible to gather and share this information using methods other than through maps, as we’ll explore later in this series.

Community

Finally, it's worthwhile to note that the idea of "community" itself can be a little vague, particularly when it comes to where asset mapping begins and ends geographically.

To a degree, the boundaries of a cultural asset mapping are going to be informed by the service areas of the group or groups organizing the project; regional organizations may be more inclined to look regionally, while neighborhood organizations may be more inclined to focus in on a narrower geography.

There's no clear consensus on whether cultural asset mapping works particularly well at a particular geographic level. Many of our survey respondents shared the perspective that you begin to lose attention to detail in geographies larger than a single neighborhood, while some countered that in larger geographies, you may have easier access to data and a broader set of potential assets to consider.

Looking at it from a numeric perspective, nearly 3 in 5 of our respondents (58.8%) felt that cultural asset mapping works particularly well at a neighborhood or district level, and more than a third (35.3%) that it was effective when focused in on a particular block or street.

Still, sizable numbers also reported that it could be quite effective at a town, city or county level, and more than a fifth (20.6%) thought it works well at an even larger regional level, with some pointing to successful projects that covered a region of 25 towns or an entire Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Many felt that cultural asset mapping could work at virtually any level. It just depends what you're trying to accomplish and how you plan to reach your goals.

"The physical scale [of cultural asset mapping] doesn't matter as much as it does that people feel comfortable talking about a subject they might not initially understand."

- Respondent from Our Survey

I WANT TO KNOW WHY A GROUP WOULD DECIDE TO DO CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING – OR WHY THEY WOULDN'T

As we explained above, cultural asset mapping runs into all sorts of definitional challenges. Without the expertise of one or more trained consultants, and without some careful planning, it can be a complicated process.

Still, it's something that's increasingly being employed across the United States – and around the world – as a key part of community revitalization strategies. Even if it's sometimes difficult to communicate what cultural asset mapping is and isn't, communities are clearly seeing value in the practice that outweighs its challenges.

So let's take a look at why a community might decide to employ cultural asset mapping – and what might hinder such an undertaking. Here are the top cultural asset mapping benefits and challenges identified by our 62 experts.

Benefits of Cultural Asset Mapping

#5. Cultural asset mapping builds capacity among community leaders.

In cultural asset mapping, there can sometimes be a strong focus on what the final products are going to be and how they'll ultimately be employed. But our survey respondents also pointed to the value of the *process* by which you get those products – and the impact that process can have on community leadership. They noted that cultural asset mapping can help people recognize their own artistic talents, as well as the talents of fellow community members.

The cultural asset mapping process can help validate and raise visibility of the work that grassroots leaders have already done, strengthening existing community leadership. It can also be a great device for bringing forward new community leaders (including artists) and moving them toward being more active in the community. The process can be the impetus for participants and stakeholders to begin launching their own community projects.

#4. Cultural asset mapping creates a foundation for future community action.

When it's done well, cultural asset mapping offers a myriad of opportunity for community action at all levels. Final products like plans, white papers and maps can inform future revitalization investments in a community and can leave them better positioned to market amenities to the outside world, such as around cultural tourism. Moreover, the information gathered through cultural asset mapping can be tools for advocacy and fundraising; there's increased clarity around why places matter and why we should invest in them.

Respondents also noted that the information gathering can lead to better relationships and better understanding between community members and their local government – and even between different departments within local government itself.

#3. Cultural asset mapping increases community connectivity.

That's probably because, regardless of how it's approached and what information surfaces, cultural asset mapping has an almost implied focus on increasing connectivity. It often has a strong focus on increasing connectivity between arts organizations, artists and the broader community, but respondents also noted that it helps "connect the dots" between different community priorities and different community assets. It helps identify existing relationships within a place, as well as relationships that could be formed in the near future. All of that heightened awareness means that the community ends up being better connected to resources and assets – and to one another.

#2. Cultural asset mapping improves feelings have toward a community.

It's probably not surprising, then, that many respondents reported that people have improved perceptions of communities following cultural asset mapping. The process can help de-escalate any existing tensions within a community and can leave people feeling that their perspectives have been both heard and valued. In turn, this can lead to heightened levels of trust, greater community pride, more sense of unity and more sense of community ownership. Several respondents noted that there's almost always a sense of heightened momentum and positive trajectory in a community following a cultural asset mapping process.

#1. Cultural asset mapping increases clarity about what's happening in a community.

These positive feelings probably surface because cultural asset mapping has a tremendous power to clarify community conditions. People walk away with an expanded awareness of what cultural assets exist in their community and can see arts and culture's role in a new way. The process can reveal what strengths can be leveraged to build a community from the inside – and leave it less reliant on outside resources. At the same time, it can also reveal community weaknesses – what gaps exist, what barriers to participation exist and what assets might be in danger without further investment.

That greater understanding of what's strong and what's weak can lead to greater clarity around how best to move the community forward – and what goals might be appropriate to pursue. The process can also lead to the identification of a stronger community identity – an authentic narrative about why a place matters.

Challenges in Cultural Asset Mapping

#5. Limited funding can make the process difficult.

Like with just about any revitalization effort, financial resources can dictate just how robust a cultural mapping process a community is able to undertake. Our survey respondents noted that managing the expense of the mapping process itself can be challenging – but that the bigger challenge can be finding additional funding to make implementation investments based on what comes out of that mapping. Failing to act on what emerges from cultural asset mapping can impact how people feel about the process, as well as how they feel about participating in future planning efforts.

#4. Cultural asset mapping can run into process challenges.

Even before you get to implementation, though, cultural asset mapping can present some process design challenges. The decisions a community makes early on can limit the type of information that emerges from cultural mapping. Respondents noted that organizing groups can have a tendency to select too large a geography, or to focus too exclusively on physical space, or to focus too heavily on quantitative measures.

Once a project is underway, it can still run into data limitations. Ongoing changes in things like data availability and mapping technology can limit the ability to draw out information, particularly for communities that are interested in tracking how things are changing over time. Moreover, data sets can tend to skew toward more formalized cultural activity; several respondents noted that identifying less formalized cultural groups can be particularly challenging, even when capturing grassroots activity is among a community's top priorities.

#3. Limited community understanding can impede the mapping process.

At least part of those data challenges can stem from a limited public understanding of cultural asset mapping process. There may be a lack of public clarity about what the process is working to accomplish or what its specific outcomes are anticipated to be. Community members may be unfamiliar with how community mapping works and need considerable instruction in order to participate in meaningful ways. And as we've already noted above, even defining terms like "culture" and "asset" can be challenging. Several survey respondents noted that there is a tendency for people to define both terms too narrowly ... or to be skeptical that cultural assets exist within their community at all.

#2. Getting the “right people” involved in the process can be difficult.

Given these barriers to participation, it's probably not surprising that many survey respondents pointed to meaningful engagement as a top challenge. Sometimes, community input and buy-in is lost because a process is designed in a non-participatory way. In other cases, cultural mapping organizers might want substantial community engagement, but they still run into difficulty assembling target groups that they consider to be critical – whether than be municipal leaders, low-income populations, artists or any other target group.

There can be a lot of different reasons for lack of participation. There may be a general lack of interest in the process, or there may be a real or perceived threat that affects trust of the process – for example, that there's an unspoken agenda behind it or that it might ultimately encourage gentrification.

Clearly, community engagement is a big and important topic, so we'll be spending more time on it later in this series.

#1. It can be difficult to assemble an effective leadership team around the project.

Getting people external to the project team engaged can be difficult, but survey respondents also pointed to how hard it can be assembling the project leadership itself. To start, they noted that it can be difficult to identify a lead organization with the capacity and interest to champion the process – particularly one that will follow the mapping process with some kind of meaningful implementation activity.

Once a lead organization is in place, the next question is who else will inform the process design and implementation. The lead organization may choose to act without partners, in which case the cultural asset mapping process may not be connected in meaningful ways to other community work and initiatives. Alternately, the lead organization may have difficulty engaging partners in a meaningful way. The team may have conflicting needs, values and/or organizational cultures. Participating partners in the team may be poorly resourced, and financial pressures could mean that cultural asset mapping will be a low priority for them. And even with strong, high-functioning leadership, project teams might not include a cultural asset mapping expert, which can limit their capacity to build a meaningful, mission-focused process.

“The danger is that cultural asset mapping can become an abstract exercise, primarily for an audience of core arts and cultural stakeholders. By partnering it with a local or regional planning effort, one should be able to marry the insights revealed with policy (and then action).”

- Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, Principal, Metris Arts Consulting

Mission Focus

Whether you're looking to maximize the benefits of cultural asset mapping or to minimize the challenges, the same two words are going to be critical – “mission focus”. Mission is perhaps the single most important topic in launching a cultural asset mapping project. Deciding how you do cultural asset mapping is important. But having a shared understanding of *why* you're doing it is absolutely critical.

At a basic level, we can look back to our definition of cultural asset mapping to frame our intent – in order to identify arts and cultural assets. But the bigger question is why? Why is identifying assets important?

The immediate reason cultural asset mapping is happening needs to be explicit – and clear for all partners and participants.

It could be about:

- Understanding – Identifying what's here, what's not here, how things are connected and how cultural assets could advance community priorities.
- Planning – Framing what could be here, what could be connected in the future and what new efforts could have the most substantial impact.
- Advocating – Articulating what's needed, why it's needed and what those investments could mean for the future of the community.
- Engaging – Expanding whose voice and whose vision are elevated in describing a community, as well as whose leadership capacity could be built in the future.

It could be about any or all of these things, and it could be about advancing a very specific priority.

Place Matters' focus, for instance, was on identifying cultural assets to draw attention to assets that might be lost if more resources aren't put into preserving them. The Sonoran Institute's **cultural asset mapping process with three Kwapa communities** was focused on promoting conservation and building tribal capacity to protect and promote their cultural heritage. In St. Paul, West Side Community Health Services conducted a **cultural asset assessment** among Somali, Latino and Hmong communities as part of a larger effort to increase neighborhood-level health and wellness.

In each of these examples, the organizations leading cultural asset mapping projects linked them to very specific objectives. Participants knew exactly why the projects were happening and what their participation was expected to accomplish. By spending time thinking about the mission of your asset mapping project – a mission that aligns with the priorities and goals of your organization, your partners and your broader community – you'll have a much better sense of what you're trying to accomplish ... and what you need to get there.

FURTHER READING

The following are a collection of toolkits, guides and examples that can give you a fuller sense of what cultural asset mapping is and how people get it done.

Art in Action Toolkit: A straightforward toolkit from the Tennessee Arts Commission for communities who want to know how to carry out a cultural inventory.

Brattleboro CoreArts Project: Brattleboro, Vermont's project is a great resource for anyone who wants a peek at the nuts-and-bolts of cultural asset mapping. They've made available all of their presentations and meeting notes, as well as their resulting "Atlas of Cultural Assets".

Building Healthy Communities :: Cultural Treasures:

In support of The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative, the Alliance for California Traditional Arts has led and shared the results of cultural asset mapping in four different communities.

Cherokee Cultural Mapping: Here, the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee describes the mission focus of their cultural mapping collaboration with the Eastern Band of Cherokee and other partners.

Cultural Economy Planning Map: This GIS interface from the New Orleans Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy is an excellent example of ongoing cultural asset mapping. Data on the map is updated each winter.

D.I.Y Creative Placemaking: Artscape Toronto's D.I.Y. Creative Placemaking offers a plethora of advice and resources about arts approaches to community development, including how to engage your community in cultural asset mapping.

Guide to Mapping Neighborhood Arts and Cultural Assets: The Community Partnership for Arts and Culture offers a number of cultural mapping resources and examples, including a guide of questions you can use to get community members thinking about cultural assets more broadly.

Imagine Flint: Imagine Flint is a great example of a municipal master planning process where cultural asset mapping and arts planning played a key role.

Our Town-Tuscon: This project from the Tucson Pima Arts Council highlights a variety of different ways that information from a cultural asset mapping is being shared publicly, including through a cultural asset map, a capstone report and an on-the-ground asset visibility campaign.

Waterloo Regional Cultural Mapping: This briefing document outlines in detail how a multi-city cultural asset mapping project was carried out. It takes time to explain a lot of terms and approaches that are important in cultural mapping work.

MAPPING OUT CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: IDENTIFYING LOCAL ARTISTS

“Local independent artists may be hard to include because they may not be tapped into arts organizations, particularly as some may not consider themselves artists but more traditional craftsmakers.” - Respondent from Our Survey

In this section, we’re outlining an example of how a community might go about identifying one particular type of culture asset – local individual artists. We’ve heard from a lot of people that finding artists can be particularly tricky. People who create art or lead arts programming don’t always call themselves artists. They may not be earning money from artwork. They may not be associated with an arts nonprofit.

Collectively, that can mean that individual artists might not always be highly visible in a community ... But it doesn’t mean we can’t find them!

Scanning for Existing Artist Directories

We always recommend starting by looking at whether someone’s already done the work in identifying artists in a particular community.

Often, local and state arts and humanities agencies will have a public directory of artists, or at least a list of individuals who have received grants in the past. A local college may have an alumni directory that can point us to graduates in arts fields. A local visitor’s bureau may have an up-to-date list of artist-led spaces.

Getting a General Sense of the Local Arts Economy

We can also turn to national data sources to get a better sense of what creative employment looks like in a community. For instance, communities in the United States can use the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ [Location Quotient Calculator](#) to identify where they are nationally competitive in creative industries.

A location quotient is a pretty straightforward way to find out how the local economy stacks up against the national economy; industries that have particularly strong local employment have a location quotient above 1, while industries with lower employment levels compared to other parts of the country have a location quotient of less than 1.

By creating location quotients for arts-related industries, you can hone in on the places in your community where you'd expect to find particularly large densities of artists – places like fine arts schools or museums or sound recording businesses.

Reaching Out to Local Nonprofits

We can also turn to national databases to identify local nonprofits that we'd anticipate work with artists. For instance, we can use **data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics** to pull an exhaustive list of arts organizations within a particular community - including very small nonprofits.

We may also want to reach out to *non-arts* organizations. They sometimes get overlooked, but places of worship, schools, hospitals and small businesses often have some kinds of community arts programming being led by local artists.

Talking to Current Service Recipients

As simple as it sounds, you can just start asking people that you already serve to see if they do anything artistic. If you already have sign-in sheets at community meetings or any other standardized way that your organization collects contact information, adding an “artist” checkbox is an easy way to get a solid list going.

Asking the Broader Community

So far, we've looked at data sets that will do a good job of identifying higher-profile artists in a community – artists working in a particular industry or with a particular nonprofit or that have an existing connection to our organization. To get a fuller sense of who's involved artistically, it may be beneficial to have broader conversations with stakeholders. By getting more voices involved in the mapping process, we're more likely to obtain a nuanced sense of artistic talent.

Further along in the process, you might even consider offering artist micro-grants as a way to incentivize artists to step forward and get involved. Artist stipends can also have broader benefits on the process itself. You could pay artists to help you capture stories; to perform outside of community rooms to draw bigger audiences to asset mapping meetings; to assist with design or photography work; or to launch their own small-scale asset mapping that can feed into your larger effort.

Closing Thoughts

Of course, this is just one potential set of strategies for drawing out information about one type of cultural asset. What information you'll ultimately gather – and how you'll gather it – depends a lot on the context in your particular community.

MAPPING OUT CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING

ARTPLACE

spire + base

I'm very excited to be participating in this conversation today. In my own work, I've seen just what an extraordinary impact cultural asset mapping can have on communities.

Cleveland's Collinwood neighborhood, where I'm broadcasting from today, is a case in point.



Collinwood grew up opposite the Collinwood Rail Yards – at one point, the largest industrial rail complex between New York and Chicago.

Like a lot of older industrial communities, it was incredibly susceptible to global changes in how we manufacture and transport goods. As employment prospects shrank at the rail yards, the neighborhood experienced challenge after challenge.

Between 1940 and 2010, the neighborhood experienced rapid population loss – the equivalent of losing one resident every 52 hours ... for 70 straight years.

That population loss wreaked havoc on the built environment, contributing to incredibly high levels of vacancy, limited economic opportunity, weakened social networks and market disincentives to investment.



That’s not to say, though, that it was a community without assets – they were just undervalued. It was the birthplace of the American Polka tradition. It was a lakefront community, bounded by beaches and parks. It was incredibly diverse and incredibly affordable.

And all of these undervalued assets led to the arrival of a new artist immigration in the 1980s and the 1990s. In 2000, neighborhood resident Cindy Barber took a risk and opened the Beachland Ballroom on a commercial corridor with a 40% vacancy rate. The facility quickly cemented itself as one of the country’s top indie music venues. Waterloo Arts opened shortly after and focused on how a grassroots visual arts nonprofit could increase social connectivity. Northeast Shores – the neighborhood’s primary community development organization started assisting artists in purchasing homes and storefronts along the corridor.

Building by building and project by project, Collinwood started to come back.



And cultural asset mapping played a big role in that revitalization. Northeast Shores engaged hundreds of residents and workers in thinking about community culture. Through interviews, focus groups, photography exhibits, artist mini-grants, data mapping and community surveying, the organization led a careful examination of what made the neighborhood unique.

The results of those efforts have been pretty tremendous. The organization has been able to steer its investments more precisely, targeting dollars toward high-priority vacant properties and toward the launch of more than 300 artist-led community projects. Both the local and national media took notice, and it wasn't long before artists who had never been to Cleveland before began to contemplate a move there.

Today, the neighborhood is showing lots of signs of recovery. Waterloo Road has seen its vacancy rate shrink from 40% to 6% over the past 15 years. The housing market has stabilized, and instead of demolition, people are talking about new construction. And despite all of that increased market activity, the neighborhood remains incredibly diverse across race, ethnicity and income.



Cultural asset mapping has played a big part in that transformation, but I think even more importantly, it has provided neighborhood residents and workers with a platform for sharing their priorities and their ambitions. New leaders have emerged, and everyday people are actively thinking about art’s role in revitalization – not just in terms of aesthetics or cultural tourism but in terms of how art can advance priorities like community health, wealth-building and public safety. Annual surveying is showing that community pride, desire to stay in the neighborhood long-term and feelings that the community is on a positive trajectory are all the rise.

It’s been a remarkable turnaround, and it’s just one example in one community of how cultural asset mapping is having a profound impact. Communities across the country and around the world are seeing similar results to Collinwood.

Northeast Shores’ cultural efforts: www.welcometocollinwood.com

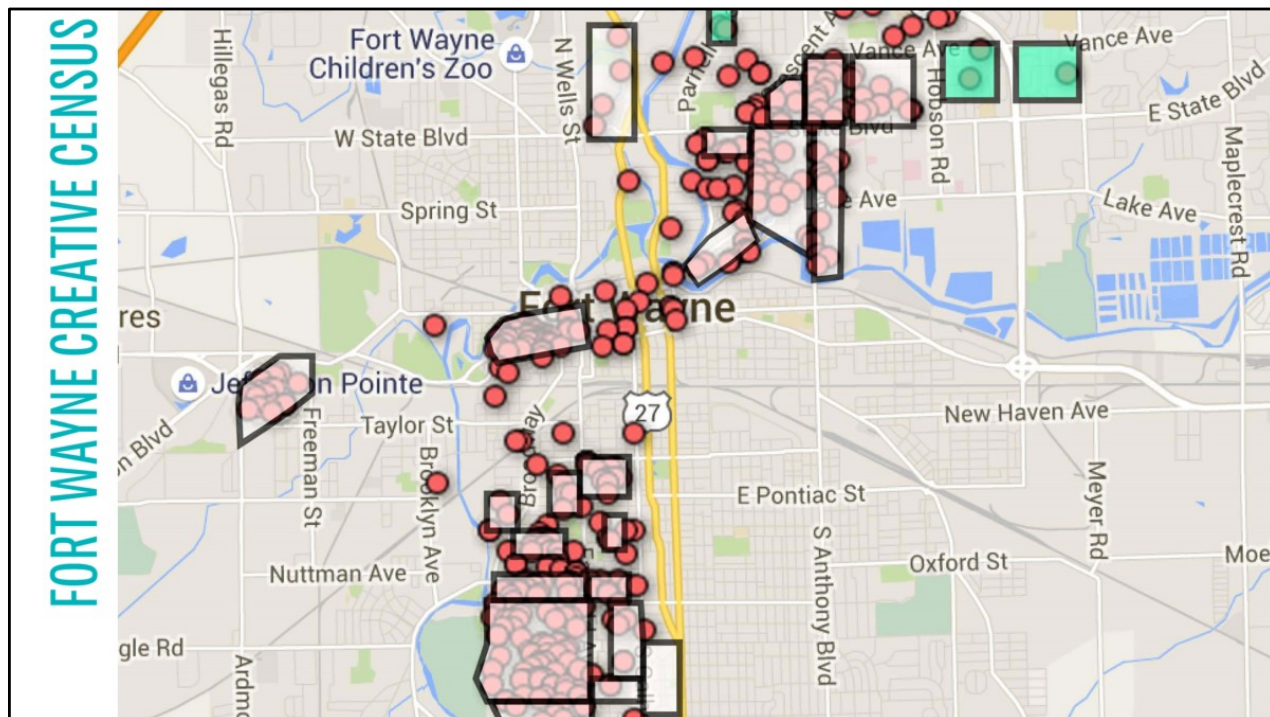
CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING:

“ANY PROCESS BY WHICH A COMMUNITY WORKS TO IDENTIFY THEIR ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS, INCLUDING PEOPLE, PLACES, EVENTS AND/OR REAL ESTATE.”

That’s not to say that cultural asset mapping isn’t challenging to figure out.

I’ve found in my own work that one of the biggest challenges in cultural asset mapping is just defining what it is and isn’t.

Here’s our working definition: “Any process by which a community works to identify their arts and cultural assets, including people, places, events and/or real estate.”



There's clearly a broad set of approaches that could fit into that, and not everyone calls it cultural asset mapping, which can make it harder to find examples and resources.

Groups could call this same process asset mapping or an asset inventory or an arts census or even a community storytelling project.

Fort Wayne Creative Census: <http://wboi.org/post/wunderkammer-undertakes-arts-census-region#stream/0>



Cultural asset mapping can also be one component of a larger effort. You might see it as a key component of a community master plan, as is the case in Flint, Michigan.

Imagine Flint: www.imagineflint.com



Or it could be one component of addressing a key community issue, like the Alliance for California Traditional Arts' cultural asset mapping as part of the Healthy Communities initiative.

Building Healthy Communities :: Cultural Treasures:

www.actaonline.org/content/building-healthy-communities-cultural-treasures

DEFINING "CULTURE"

Stepping down a level, it can also be hard to define what's cultural and what isn't.

When we think about a community's culture – what makes it a place with a distinct, shared identity, it might extend beyond the arts. We find examples of community culture under names like heritage, history, traditions, humanities.

Plus, what we consider to be an arts organization might not call itself an arts organization, and people who create art or lead arts programming might not call themselves an artist.

That can make it hard to get a full sense of the full range of cultural assets in a community. Further complicating things, there are a lot of arts-based or cultural approaches to getting people engaged in mapping out assets. So in some cases, people may be referring to mapping out cultural assets, and in other cases, they may be talking about taking cultural approaches to mapping out assets more broadly.

DEFINING "ASSET"

Asset can be tricky to define, too. We obviously don't all universally value things in the same way.

“PEOPLE THINK OF ASSETS DIFFERENTLY. FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE I MAY THINK IT’S GREAT TO HAVE A PARK NEAR MY HOUSE, OTHERS MAY THINK IT’S A HAVEN FOR CRIME. SO DEFINING ASSETS IS DIFFICULT.”

**– JOANNA WORONKOWICZ, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, INDIANA UNIVERSITY**

To one person, a vacant historic theater might be very clearly a cultural asset. To another, it might just be a nuisance property.



Or take this example. Last year, Norwich City Council was exploring a skateboard ban in parts of the city center, arguably to protect assets like gardens and a war memorial. This prompted the Accidental Youth Club – an ecologist, an architect and an economic geographer – to lead Norwich skateboarders in mapping out assets from a youth perspective.

Norwich Skateboarder Mapping:

www.accidentalyouthclub.wordpress.com/norwich-skate-ban/

DEFINING "MAPPING"

Mapping itself can be tricky to define, too.

The vast majority of cultural asset mapping projects *do* involve some kind of mapping.

But it's entirely possible to identify cultural assets using methods other than maps and sharing the results in ways other than on a map. So we mean mapping in a very broad sense.

WHAT 62 EXPERTS HAVE TO SHARE WITH YOU.

Clearly, cultural asset mapping isn't a single thing. It can have a lot of different focuses, and it can involve a lot of different approaches. It's big.

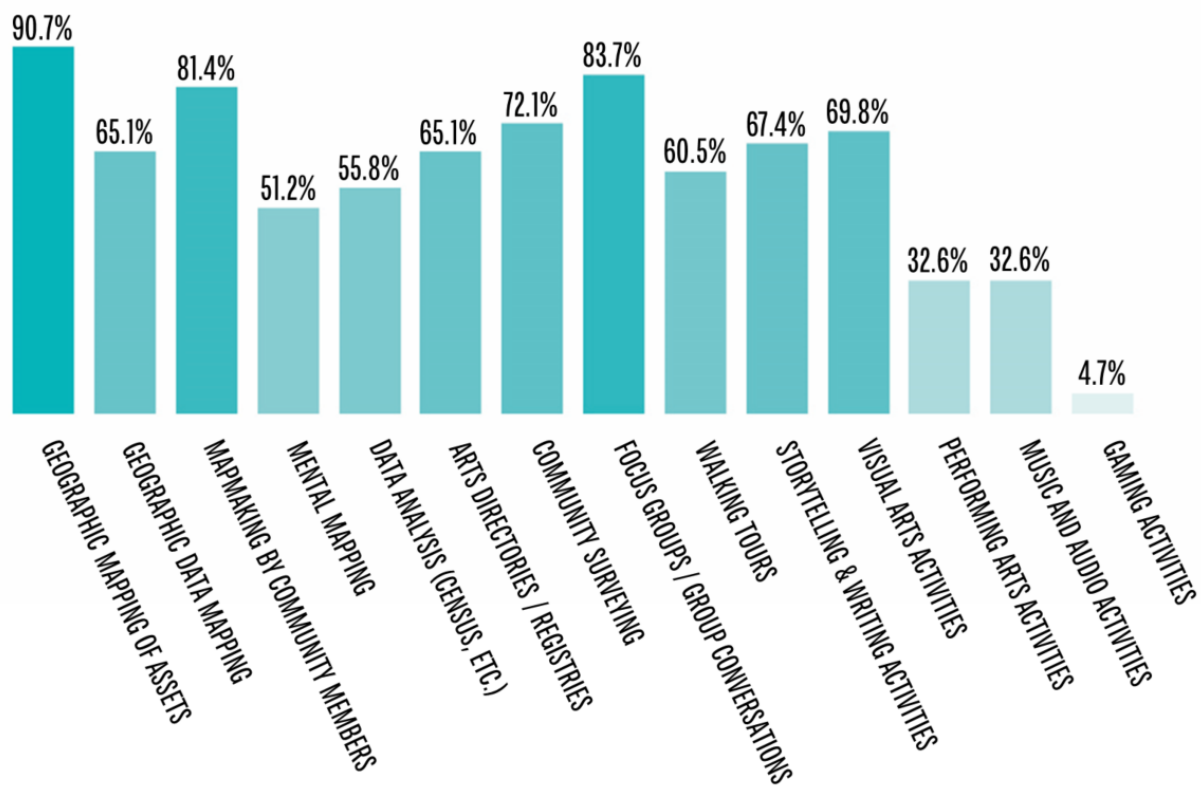
There are a lot of very talented consultants working in cultural asset mapping – some of whom you'll hear from later today. We'd always recommend having someone on your team with expertise in this arena, someone who can help you navigate what can be a complicated process.

But to know how best to engage a consultant – and what the scope of their work should be – it's helpful to get a general sense of what the cultural asset mapping landscape looks like.

So we've been working to do that. We reached out and surveyed leaders in community arts, community development, all levels of government, consulting and academia. We heard back from 62 experts, who provided us with their advice, based on asset mapping projects that they've led, participated in or studied.

SELECTING A METHODOLOGY.
FINDING SOURCES OF DATA.
GETTING PEOPLE ENGAGED.

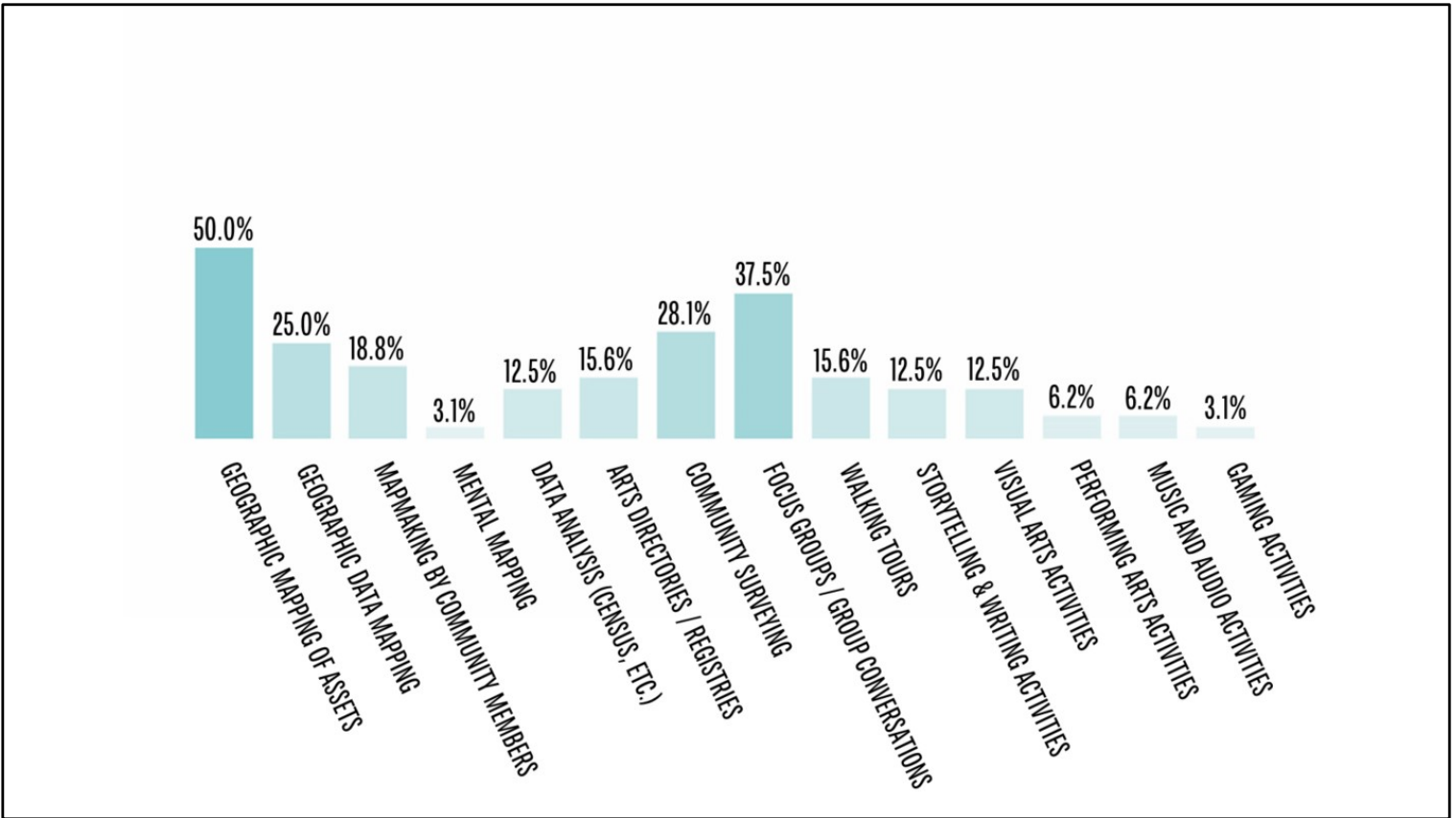
Today, we want to focus in on what they had to say about three key topics. Then we'll have a broader conversation about cultural asset mapping in our panel discussion.



But first, let's jump into methodology – how exactly you go about identifying cultural assets.

As we already noted, there are a lot of different ways to go about it, as you can see in the graph here. In our survey, we asked our experts to help us identify what approaches to cultural asset mapping are the most common.

Geographic mapping of assets and engaging people in small group conversations seem to be very common, but there's clearly a lot of variety here. There are different types of mapping, other data approaches, focuses on getting community dialogue going and approaches that use arts activity to get people engaged.

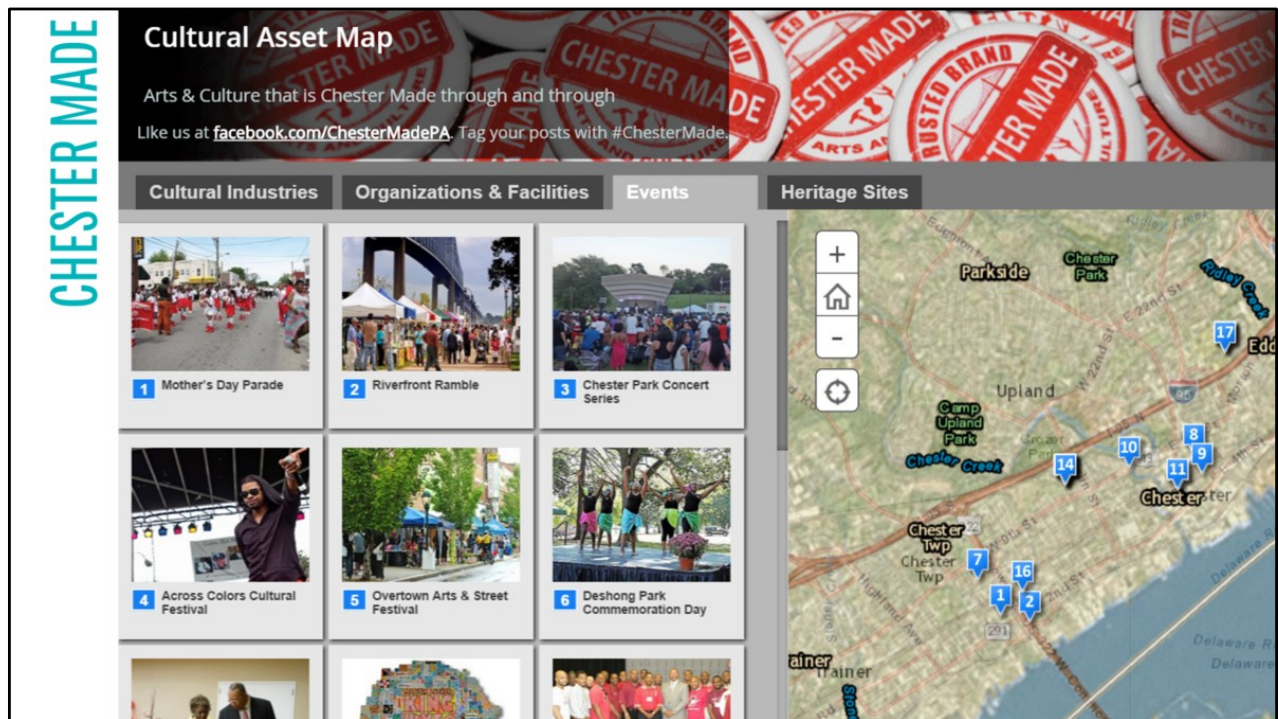


We also asked our survey respondents whether there were any approaches that they *preferred* to use – ones that they found to be particularly effective.

I think that the important takeaway from this graph is that there is a wide variety in the types of strategies people think are effective.

Many shared that it really depends on the community that you’re working in, as well as the overall goal of your cultural asset mapping project. And many noted that they prefer to employ multiple approaches within a single project.

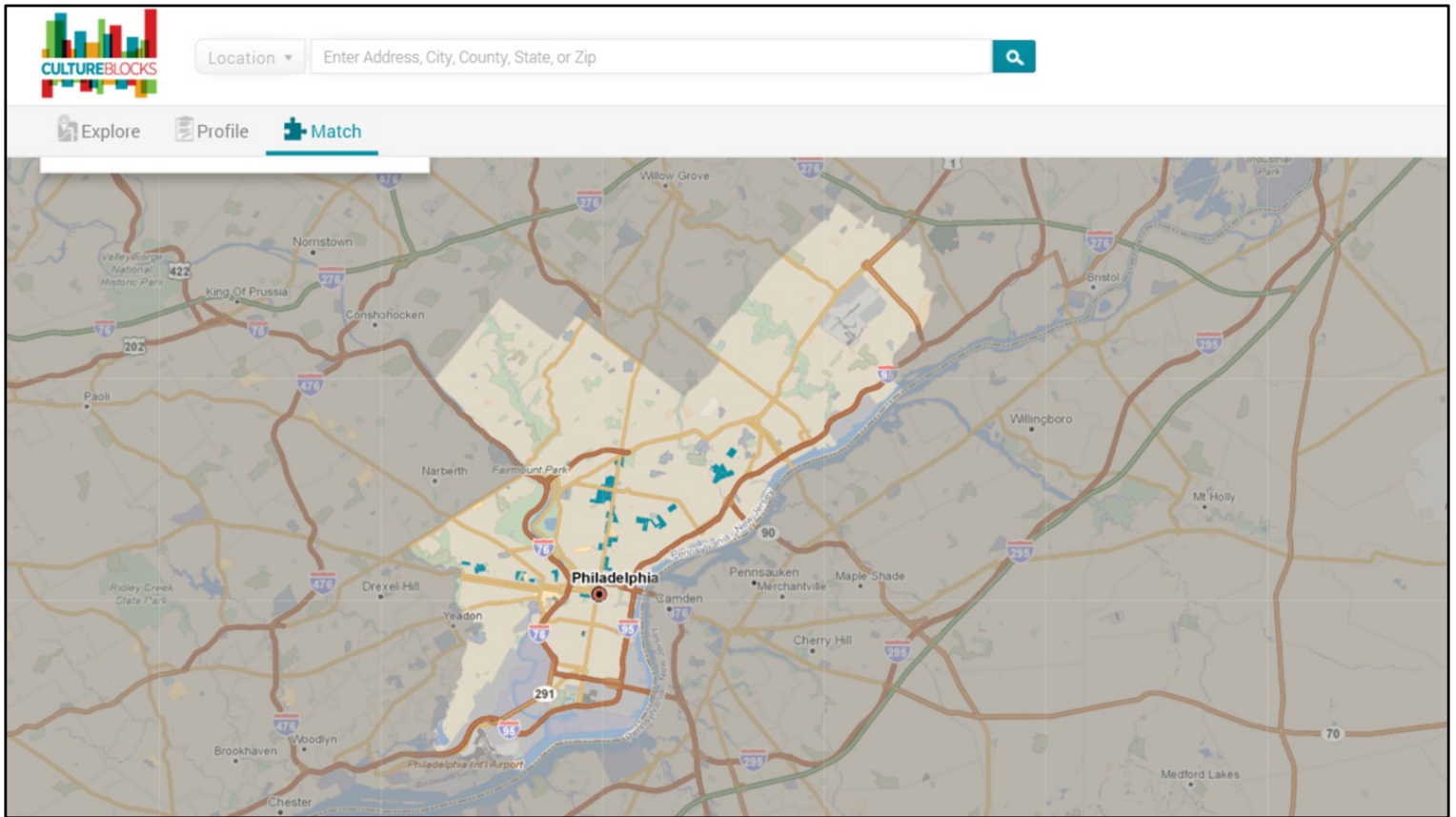
So let’s spend a few minutes focusing in on those different types of approaches.



By far, the most common approach is identifying where cultural assets lie geographically on a map. That could be, for example, mapping out where artists live or work, where arts organizations are located or places where cultural programming takes place.

Chester Made is a great example. The project engaged 350 residents of Chester, Pennsylvania, through surveys and storytelling. Through that process, they were able to map out 116 cultural assets, including businesses, nonprofits, events and heritage sites.

Chester Made Cultural Asset Map: www.chestermade.chestercity.com



Mapping out larger data sets is another common methodology. I think one of the most ambitious data mapping efforts out there is CultureBlocks.

It's a partnership between the city of Philadelphia, The Reinvestment Fund and the Social Impact of the Arts Project. It enables users to find detailed information about neighborhood-level culture.

For instance, in this map, the blue areas are areas of the city where the number of arts and culture nonprofits is high, access to high-speed rail is high but where median household income is low. It's that detailed.

CultureBlocks: www.cultureblocks.com



Cultural asset mapping often includes maps of culturally significant locations or data with cultural relevance, but mapping projects don't stop there. There are projects that have mapped out people's stories, historic photographs ... even descriptions of what people smell when they're in a particular place.

In the UK, a research project at the London School of Economics has led to the Mappiness app. Once a day, users are prompted to share how happy they are, together with information about where they're at, who they're with and what they're doing.

That data is then getting plotted out on maps, enabling the researchers to explore what kinds of experiences and locations promote the greatest sense of happiness.

Mappiness: www.mappiness.org.uk

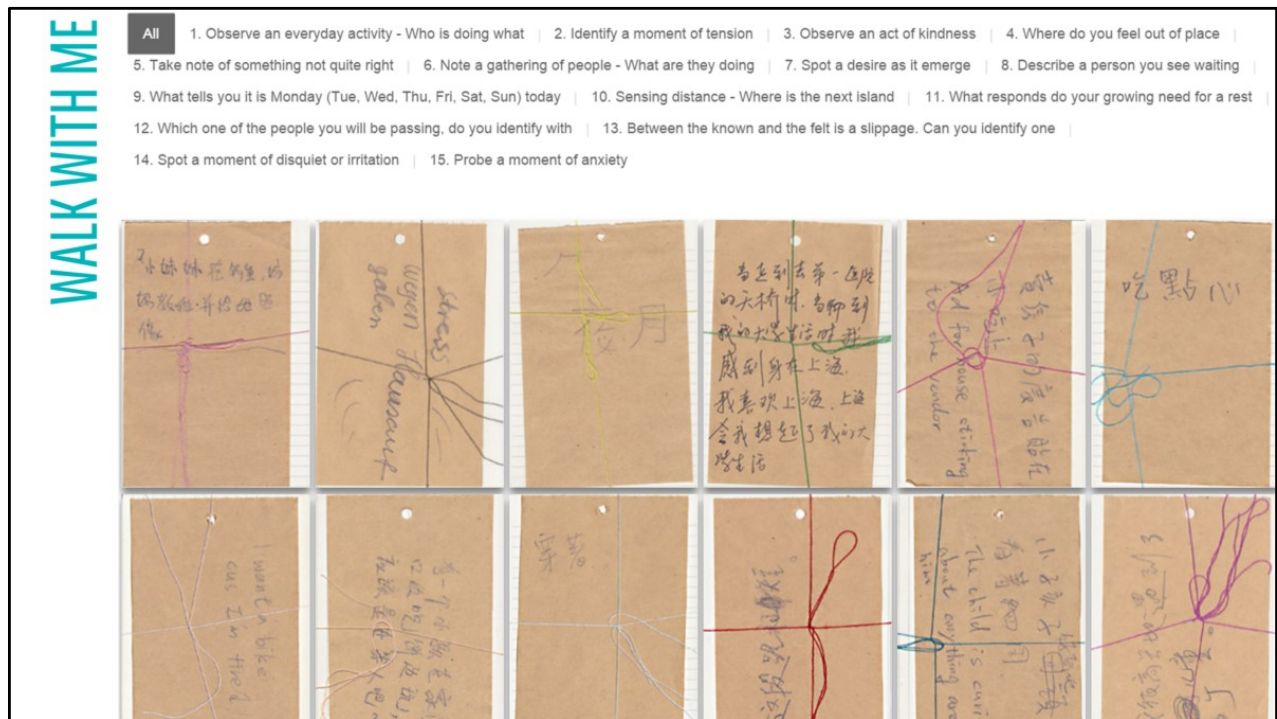


It's a methodology that is exploring not only where assets are located but also what people's experiences are like. That attention to the human element is also a major focus of what we call dialogue approaches – any kind of method to get people *talking* about cultural assets in their community.

That can be as simple as engaging them in a survey or a one-or-one interview. It could also be getting them involved in a broader conversation – in focus groups, in community meetings or in any other kind of gathering.

In the Centro region of Portugal, the University of Coimbra kicked off a large-scale, local cultural asset mapping process with a three-day conference that brought together hundreds of cartographers, sociologists and artists from around the world to share thoughts around cultural asset mapping. It brought a huge brain trust into the region, giving local stakeholders the opportunity to engage in a meaningful dialogue before getting involved in their own community's asset mapping effort.

Mapping Culture: www.ces.uc.pt/eventos/mappingculture/



Walking tours are another frequent strategy for getting people engaged in dialogue – this time outside of the meeting room. It gets people out and thinking about their environment in a different way – thinking about what types of assets are all around them.

These walks are sometimes carefully charted out, particularly when there are specific places that you want people to pay attention to. But there are also a number of walking tour projects that draw out unexpected information along random routes through a community.

In Petra Johnson’s walk with me projects in Beijing and Cologne, she had participants drop a knotted string onto a map – scaled so that it would represent a walking route of about 60 minutes. Petra and participants then walked as closely as possible the random route made by the string.

Along the way, they responded to different challenges – things like finding a gathering of people and noting what they’re doing or observing the distance between two areas where a lot of activity was occurring. The stories collected from participants on multiple routes then began to overlap and form a story about what people were collectively observing in their community.

‘walk with me’: www.walk-with-me.org.uk

MAKING CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

‘walk with me’ is a great example of how arts activity can be used as an asset mapping technique.

Arts activity can be a great way to expand participants’ thinking and to draw out assets that might be overlooked with more traditional techniques.

And I find that engaging people in arts activity is particularly good for a community where a lot of community planning work has already happened. By making the experience fun and social, it can bring in new people in that aren’t regularly attending community meetings ... and for those that are already engaged, it can help to overcome feelings of “planning fatigue”.



Arts activity could be a lot of different things – getting people thinking about cultural assets through music or dance or writing.

In Raleigh, a neighborhood association and design faculty at North Carolina State trained residents to use smartphone video to share their stories and identify community assets, with a strong focus on a neighborhood park. The resulting stories were shared in a gallery exhibit and on local radio, and the results were also integrated into master planning for the park.

Cellphone Diaries:

<http://encompass.eku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=prism>



In Halifax, designer Emma Joy Lovell used her thesis project to turn asset mapping into a board game. Each player is given a specific role, and they operate as a team to tell stories, identify assets, address hypothetical challenges ... and make a map of their community in the process.

While game strategies (video games, board games and model-making) don't seem to be widely used approaches yet, it's worthwhile to note that several survey respondents shared that gaming is particularly useful in getting young people involved in asset mapping.

StoryPlace: www.emmajoy.ca/project/storyplace/



Lots of new arts techniques to asset mapping are popping up, but some of them have been around a long time – like PhotoVoice.

PhotoVoice was developed and researched by Caroline Wang at the University of Michigan. At its core, it leads people through a process of taking photographs of their communities, discussing what those images mean and exhibiting their work to decision-makers and the broader community.

Over the past 23 years, it's been employed in hundreds of projects around the world. This photograph is from an initiative focused on improving community health in Portland, Maine's Riverton neighborhood.

An entire academic methodology has grown up around PhotoVoice, and it's even led to some spin-off approaches, like paintvoice and comicvoice.

PhotoVoice Overview: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photovoice>

Riverton PhotoVoice Project:

http://dune.une.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=ssw_art_isttalks



Clearly, a lot of different types of art can be integrated into cultural asset mapping – and, obviously, you don’t have to use just one in a project. In Austin, the Drawing Lines project is creating a series of 10 cultural asset maps to align with the movement of city council from at-large representation to 10 geographic districts. In each of these districts, different artists are kicking off the asset mapping process in different ways – through photography, video, music, writing, woodworking and origami.

It’s doing cultural asset mapping work that’s meaningful at a city level – but also teasing out what makes places distinct at the neighborhood level.

Drawing Lines: www.drawinglinesaustin.com



It's something we heard over and over again in our survey – the best cultural asset mapping processes involve a variety of approaches.

Cobalt Connects' Expressing Vibrancy project is a particularly robust example. The project started out by doing inventories in several Hamilton, Ontario, neighborhoods – capturing counts of things like public art and cultural organizations. Then they engaged 200 volunteers in walking tours to collect data on how people felt in those environments.

Then videos were taken of different sites in the neighborhoods, and they measured 100 volunteers' physical responses to the videos – looking at how different environments affected people's heart rates, breathing and even brain activity. More recently, the research team has been involving artists – as storytellers, designers and mappers – to make the experience more engaging for participants.

It's a really detailed approach, but there's a reason for that. More than 60 communities across Ontario are in some stage of doing cultural planning work, and the research team is working to develop toolkits to inform that work. They're particularly interested in using data to help people understand what cultural vibrancy really means.

Expressing Vibrancy: www.expressingvibrancy.ca

“I THINK [THE BEST METHODOLOGY] DEPENDS ON THE CONTEXT, TIMING, PEOPLE. DIFFERENT TOOLS MAKE DIFFERENT SENSE ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS – IT’S BETTER TO HAVE A DIVERSE TOOLBOX.”

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

Cobalt Connects had a very strong sense of mission – and they built their asset mapping methodology around it.

And out of anything that we could talk about today, I think this is the single most important topic. Deciding how you do cultural asset mapping is important. But having a clear and shared understanding of *why* you’re doing it is absolutely critical.

At a basic level, we can look back to our definition of cultural asset mapping to frame why a community is investing in such a project – to identify the arts and cultural assets.

But the bigger question is why? Why is identifying assets important?

UNDERSTANDING PLANNING ADVOCATING ENGAGING

The immediate reason cultural asset mapping is happening needs to be explicit – and clear for all partners and participants.

It could be about:

- + Understanding – What’s here, what’s not here, how things are connected, how cultural assets could advance community priorities
- + Planning – what could be here, what could be connected in the future, what new efforts could have the most substantial impact
- + Advocating – What’s needed, why it’s needed, what those investments could mean for the future
- + Engaging – Whose voice, whose vision, whose responsibility, whose capacity could be built in the future

It could be about any or all of these things, and it could be about advancing a very specific priority.

CENSUS OF PLACES THAT MATTER



Place Name	Neighborhood	Borough	Description
1-19 Beak St.	Inwood	Manhattan	A striking Art Deco apartment building
109 Washington St.	Financial District	Manhattan	Tenement in the heart of vanished "Little Syria"
1520 Sedgwick Ave.	Morris Heights	Bronx	Hip hop pioneer Kool DJ Herc held his first parties here
2 Columbus Circle	Midtown	Manhattan	Controversial modernist building that once again houses an art museum
206 Bowery	Bowery	Manhattan	The last surviving Federal-style row house on Bowery
211-215 Pearl St.	Financial District	Manhattan	Facades of warehouses in old Pearl St. mercantile district, two of which have been demolished
234 West 56th Street	Midtown	Manhattan	Early home of recorded music powerhouse Atlantic Records.
27 Cooper Square	East Village	Manhattan	Former home of many notable writers, musicians and painters
275 Seventh Ave.	Midtown South	Manhattan	Former home to men's apparel industry and unions
30th Avenue Market	Astoria	Queens	Emporium of foods from nearly every corner of the world
32 Mott St. General Store (former)	Chinatown	Manhattan	General store that served the first wave of Chinese immigrants
339 W. 29th St.	Chelsea	Manhattan	Former home of prominent abolitionists
348 W. 23rd St.	Chelsea	Manhattan	Site of photographer Don Snyder's studio
35 Spring St.	Little Italy	Manhattan	19th century Federal-style row house
369th Regiment Armory	Central Harlem	Manhattan	Home of the World War I Harlem Hellfighters

Place Matters' focus, for instance, was on identifying cultural assets to draw attention to assets that might be lost if more resources aren't put into preserving them.

Census of Places That Matter: www.placematters.net/places

KWAPA CULTURAL MAPPING

THE COLORADO RIVER DELTA

LAND OF THE KWAPA

“The Kwapa people are the river. Our whole life was based on the river. By that I mean our food, shelter and beliefs, since before the arrival of the Spaniards. When you take the river, the trees and the woods away, I have no identity. I have nowhere to go. If the river stops flowing, we will no longer exist.”

—Celia Soto, tribal elder, Somerton, AZ

INTRODUCTION

These maps are the result of a participatory process involving the three Kwapa communities of Somerton, Arizona, El Maguey, Baja California and Pasa de Arriba, Sonora, as well as mapping experts from UNED, Quetzaltenango de Estudios y Geografía, and anthropologists from the University of Baja California and the university museum Cultural Investigations Center. The goal of these maps is to promote conservation, understanding and respect for the indigenous knowledge – both real and imaginary – as well as to build and increase the institutional capacity of the Kwapa to protect and promote their natural and cultural heritage.

The above participatory mapping process included workshops that reviewed the history of the Kwapa tribe since the first contact with Spanish explorers in the 16th century and the history of mapping of the region, and identified key natural and cultural features of the Kwapa landscape. These workshops were followed by field visits to sites near the community of El Maguey, including the traditional Kwapa cemetery, ancient mortar in the rock, the rock, window where abundant logs were indicated in the use of loam and semen, mountain overlook in Kwapa mythology, ancient trails over the Sierra Chagala, and a Kwapa cattle garden where the Kwapa collected seeds to incorporate them into traditional practices. Site coordinates were recorded using a GPS and the process plan used on the map. The mapping team also surveyed the region from the air, making it possible to appreciate, for the first time, how the identified features fit together in the Kwapa landscape.

Fig. The mapping team included members of the three Kwapa communities: UNED participants on Somerton and Somerton (center left), Antonio Aguilar-Pineda and Ricardo Wilson (Pasa de Arriba), Antonio Gonzalez-Lara (El Maguey) and Joseph Williams (Sonora Institute) participating near the Delta.

IMPORTANCE OF THE REGION

The Colorado River Delta, which only a handful of prairie grasses was one of the greatest desert oases in the world, covering more than 3,000 square miles – more the size of Rhode Island – has shrunk by more than 90% due to dams and diversion systems. Today, it is sustained by a trickle from experimental avian agricultural centers flown from southwestern Arizona and the Maricopa Valley, alluded from the

COLORADO RIVER FLOWS ENTERING MEXICO

Year	Flow (Million Acre Feet)
1970	25
1971	20
1972	15
1973	10
1974	5
1975	10
1976	15
1977	20
1978	25
1979	20
1980	15
1981	10
1982	5
1983	10
1984	15
1985	20
1986	25
1987	20
1988	15
1989	10
1990	5
1991	10
1992	15
1993	20
1994	25
1995	20
1996	15
1997	10
1998	5
1999	10
2000	15
2001	20
2002	25
2003	20
2004	15
2005	10
2006	5
2007	10
2008	15
2009	20
2010	25

The Sonoran Institute’s cultural asset mapping process with three Kwapa communities was focused on promoting conservation and building tribal capacity to protect and promote their cultural heritage.

Land of the Kwapa: www.sonoraninstitute.org/conservation-and-native-peoples.html



In St. Paul, West Side Community Health Services conducted a cultural asset mapping project among Somali, Latino and Hmong communities as part of a larger effort to increase neighborhood-level health and wellness.

In each of these examples, the organizations leading cultural asset mapping projects linked them to very specific objectives. Participants knew exactly why the projects were happening and what their participation was expected to accomplish.

Cultural Asset Assessment of Somali, Latino and Hmong Communities:
www.westsidechs.org/programs.php?service=22

“THE DANGER IS THAT CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING CAN BECOME AN ABSTRACT EXERCISE, PRIMARILY FOR AN AUDIENCE OF CORE ARTS AND CULTURAL STAKEHOLDERS. BY PARTNERING IT WITH A LOCAL OR REGIONAL PLANNING EFFORT, ONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO MARRY THE INSIGHTS REVEALED WITH POLICY (AND THEN ACTION).”

**– ANNE GADWA NICODEMUS, PRINCIPAL,
METRIS ART CONSULTING**

I think this is the single most important thing you can do – spend time thinking about the mission of your asset mapping – a mission that aligns with the priorities and goals of your organization, your partners and your broader community. Then select approaches that get you the information you need.

If a project’s goal was to identify the potential for arts and culture to play a bigger role in improving quality of life for low-income households, I’d be creating maps that compare where arts organizations and artists are in relationship to low-income areas in my community. I’d be reaching out to public housing authorities and social service organizations to find out what kind of cultural programming they offer. And I’d want to be sure to have a lot of low-income participants deeply involved in the asset mapping process, potentially through strategies like community storytelling or photography.

SO HOW DO WE IDENTIFY ASSETS?

Having that clear sense of purpose behind a cultural asset mapping project is key to deciding what approaches you're going to use – and to deciding what sources of information you're going to use to find those assets.

Because, trust me, there's a lot of data out there. At the start, it can seem like the biggest challenge is going to be identifying assets ... but it can be equally challenging filtering through information to decide what's critical and what's noise.

PLANNING VERSUS EVALUATION

For instance, there's often a clear difference between information you'd want to inform planning for future cultural investments, compared to evaluating the impact of past cultural investments. In both cases, having a general sense of demographics is probably important.

But then there's other data that may be more critical in evaluation than in planning. For instance, knowing how many restaurants are opening up in a community or what percentage of neighborhood children are eligible for subsidized lunches are both important to understanding what's happening in a community ... But they're probably not critical to identifying what a community's cultural assets are.

UNLESS, that is, they're critical to the mission of your particular cultural asset mapping project. If you're interested in how cultural assets can bolster a community's main streets or improve youth nutrition, then these measures could have greater importance.

WHAT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE LOCALLY?

So with mission focus in mind, let's look at some specific information resources.

The very first thing to consider is whether some form of cultural asset mapping has happened in your community in the past ... keeping in mind that it may have taken place under a different name.

Your local or state arts agency may have a directory of artists or arts organizations ... Or at least a list of individuals or organizations that have received grants. There may be existing local or state GIS systems that have already mapped out things like historic and heritage sites.

A local or regional planning agency might already have cultural assets listed as part of a broader community plan. Libraries and historical societies might have records around cultural history, and you may find some kind of cultural research housed at a local college or university.

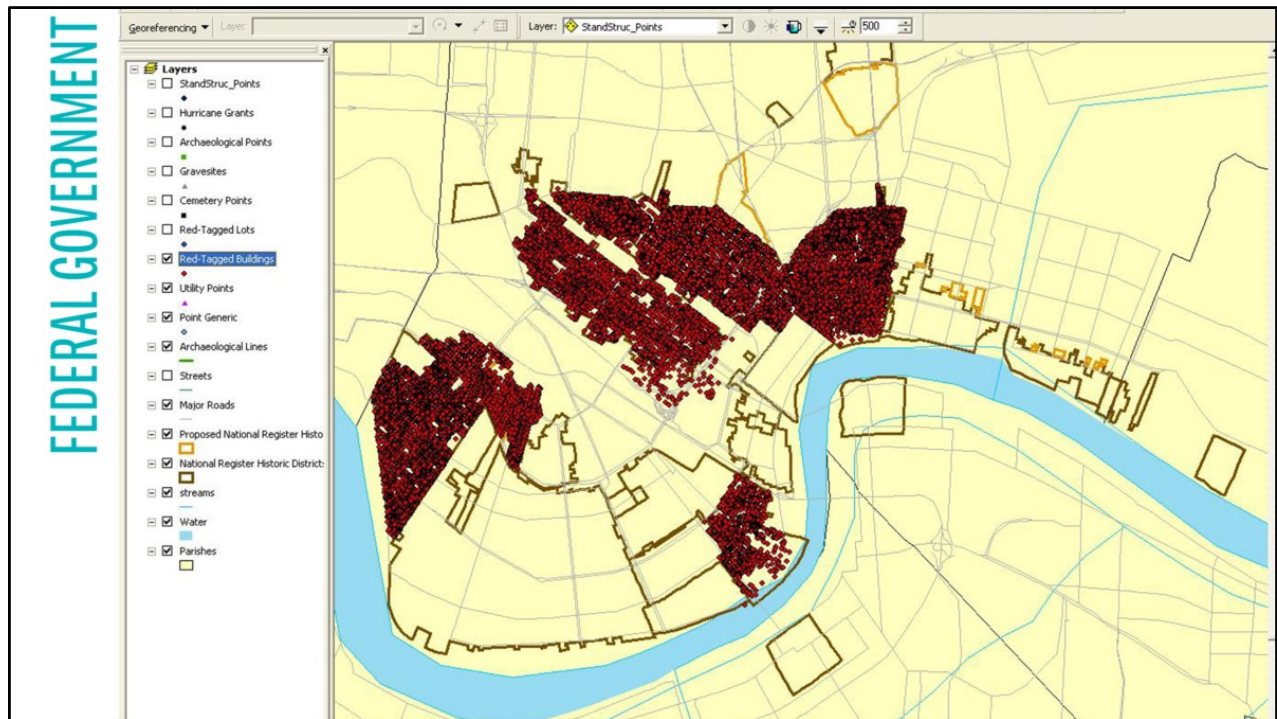
ART
PLANNING
SOCIAL SCIENCES
GEOGRAPHY
GEOLOGY
BUSINESS

ART
PLANNING
POLICE
CONVENTION + VISITORS
TRANSIT
HOUSING

That kind of work might be found in an Art Department, but it might be worthwhile to check out offerings in other divisions of a library or college, too.

Similarly, you might find some kind of cultural inventory in a lot of different areas of local government. An arts agency or a Planning Department is a great place to start, but local planning happens on a variety of different fronts, and you may find meaningful information about cultural assets housed at an Economic Development Department, a Regional Transit Authority or a Police Department.

Clearly, that's a lot of groundwork to research what's already out there. But reaching out to these kinds of groups on the front end can save you a lot of time in the long run.



Outside of what's already been inventoried locally, our survey respondents pointed to a lot of publicly accessible data sources. A lot. Here's a taste of what's available.

First, the federal government. The most common data source our survey respondents reported using was the U.S. Census, where you can find a slew of community information, including a lot down to the block level.

That's certainly not the only place in the federal government for data, though. You can find out a lot about the local economy and employment through the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The National Park Service runs a Cultural Resources GIS Facility that identifies important heritage sites around the country ... as seen in this map of New Orleans. And the National Endowment for the Arts is an incredible resource for research about arts and culture at the community level. They've even put together a list of arts and livability indicators that can help you navigate different types of data relevant to arts and community development.

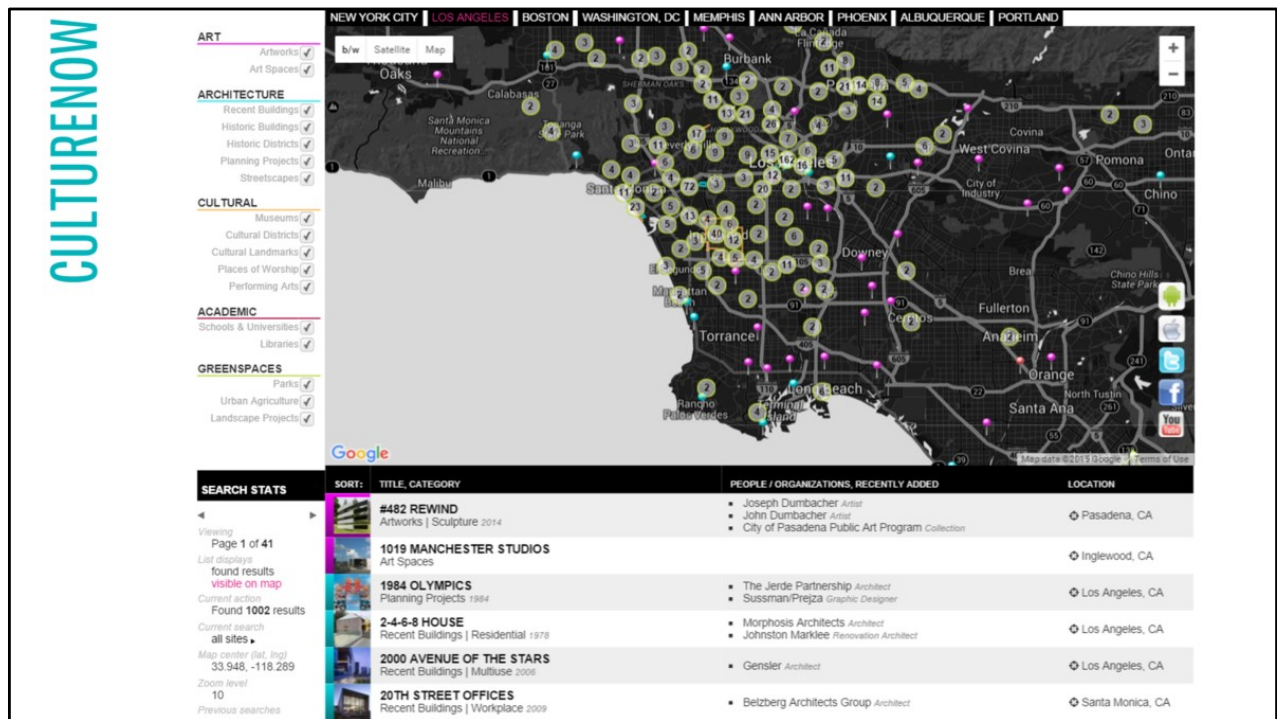
American FactFinder: www.factfinder.census.gov

Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov

Cultural Resources GIS Facility: www.nps.gov/hdp/crgis/

National Endowment for the Arts Arts Data Profile Series:

www.arts.gov/artistic-fields/research-analysis/arts-data-profile-series



There's also a lot of arts-specific resources around the country, including some that have already mapped out cultural assets.

cultureNOW, for instance, is a free, worldwide map that volunteers have populated with assets like museums, cultural districts, parks and pieces of public art. It's definitely not an exhaustive map – smaller communities may not see any cultural assets listed yet, while a community like Los Angeles has more than 1,000 mapped out.

Regardless, it's great to check out, even if just as a way to think about the different things that might constitute a cultural asset.

cultureNOW: www.culturenow.org

LOCAL ARTS INDEX	
▼ Artists and Arts Businesses	
<u>Solo artists per 100,000 population, 2009</u>	232.67
<u>Solo artists per 100,000 population, 2011</u>	240.78
<u>Solo artists per 100,000 population, 2012</u>	254.78
<u>Solo artists per 100,000 population, 2013</u>	247.88
<u>"Creative Industries" businesses per 100,000 population, 2009</u>	370.08
<u>"Creative Industries" businesses per 100,000 population, 2013</u>	306.42
<u>"Creative Industries" businesses per 100,000 population, 2014</u>	290.41
<u>Arts and culture establishments per 100,000 population, 2009</u>	75.04
<u>Arts and culture establishments per 100,000 population, 2011</u>	75.68
<u>Arts and culture establishments per 100,000 population, 2012</u>	71.77
<u>Arts and culture establishments per 100,000 population, 2013</u>	72.44
▼ Arts Nonprofits	
<u>Total nonprofit arts organizations per 100,000 population, 2009</u>	26.73

Americans for the Arts is another group doing frequent arts research at the local level.

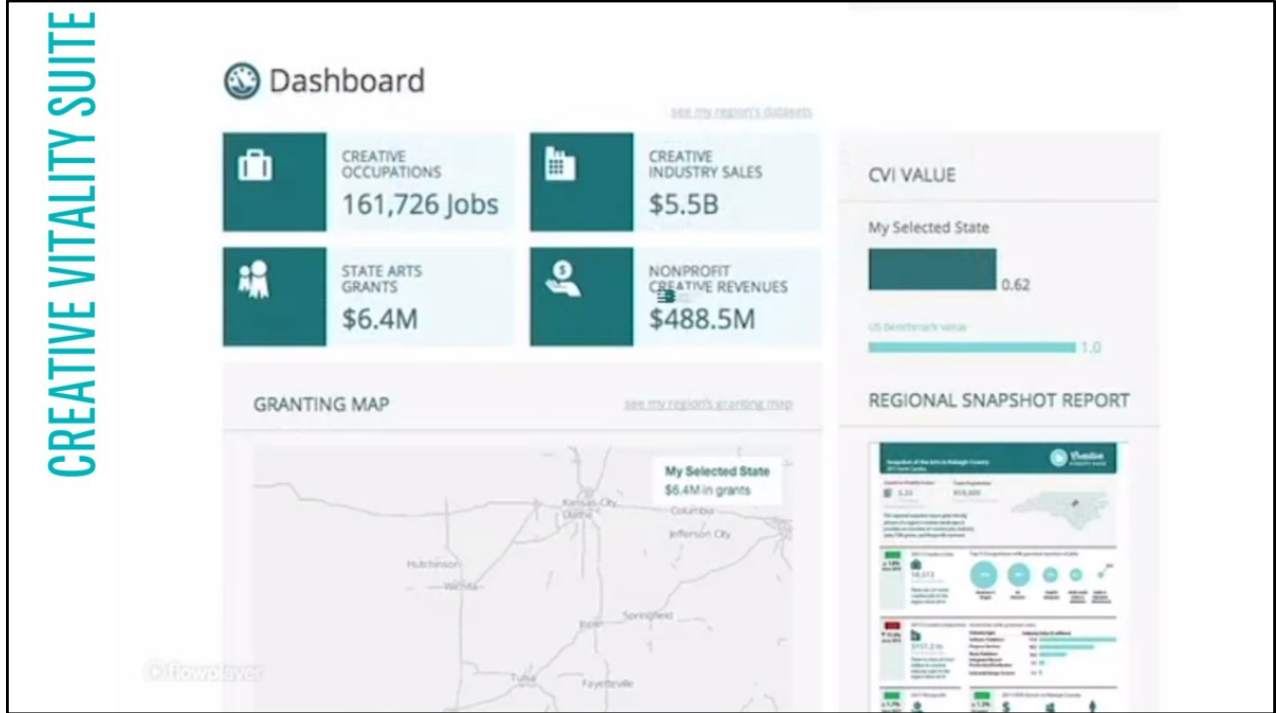
That includes their Local Arts Index, where you can get a very detailed (and free) profile of cultural activity within your county. It can show you things like how many creative industry businesses are operating there, what per capita arts organization revenue looks like and even what percentage of the local population plays a musical instrument.

Here, we see a portion of the local arts index for Anchorage, Alaska.

Americans for the Arts Research Hub:

www.americansforthearts.org/research

Local Arts Index: www.artsindexusa.org/local-arts-index



WESTAF’s Creative Vitality Suite is another great resource, where you can create a customized geography and purchase a subscription that allows you to see profiles and maps of data of things like local creative employment, arts nonprofit financials and public arts grants.

Creative Vitality Suite: www.cvsuite.org

The screenshot shows the website for Artscape D.I.Y. Creative Placemaking. The page is titled "An Introduction to Cultural Asset Mapping" and is part of a "Creative Placemaking Toolbox". The navigation menu includes "ABOUT", "CREATIVE PLACEMAKING", "CREATIVE PLACEMAKING TOOLBOX", "CASE STUDIES", and "RESOURCES". The page content includes a sidebar with questions like "How Do I Use This Toolbox?", "What Are the Main Stages of Project Development?", "What Are the Most Important Factors in a Successful Project?", "What is Pre-Project Development?", "What Should I Consider When Selecting a Site?", and "How Can I Use Planning Tools and Incentives?". The main content area discusses the importance of understanding the community context for cultural asset mapping and lists key questions to address, such as identifying creative people and understanding the cultural context.

That’s just a sampling of the many national groups that are making cultural data sets available.

It’s also worthwhile to note that many organizations have created publicly accessible guides and toolkits about how to carry out cultural asset mapping. While they may not point to particular cultural assets in your community, resources from groups like Artscape Toronto, the Center for Creative Community Development and Springboard for the Arts can give you additional ideas about your own approach to cultural mapping.



Artscape D.I.Y. Placemaking: www.artscapediy.org

Center for Creative Community Development Toolkit: www.c-3-d.org

Springboard’s Creative Exchange Toolkits:

www.springboardexchange.org/toolkits/

CHARITABLE STATISTICS DIRECTORY

Tax Period*	Name	City	State	NTEE	Rule Date	IRS Subsection	Total Revenue	Total Assets	View 990
2014	11th Mississippi Memorial Association Inc	Jackson	MS	A80 - Historical Organizations	1997	03	0	0	
2014	Alliance Francaise de Jackson	Jackson	MS	A23 - Cultural & Ethnic Awareness	1999	03	0	0	
2013	American Federation of Musicians of the Us and Canada 579 Local Jackson	Jackson	MS	A68 - Music	1940	05	0	0	
2014	American Guild of Organists 429 Jackson Chapter	Jackson	MS	A0368 - Arts, Culture & Humanities: Professional Societies & Associations	1957	03	0	0	
	Apac A3 Artists Advocates and Accolades	Jackson	MS	A0140 - Arts, Culture & Humanities: Alliances & Advocacy	2014	03	0	0	
2012	Art Center of Mississippi	Jackson	MS	A20 - Arts & Culture	2009	03	0	0	
2014	Arts Klassical Inc Friends of the Arts	Jackson	MS	A68 - Music	2008	03	0	0	

A lot of survey respondents also noted that there are important resources out there that *aren't* explicitly focused on culture.

In the earliest phases of your project, identifying cultural assets could be as simple as using something like Google Maps to identify local businesses or TripAdvisor to see what sites people are recommending for tourists.

You can also get incredibly detailed information about nonprofits in your community through sites like the National Center for Charitable Statistics and GuideStar, both of which allow you to search by organizational classification, so for instance, you can hone in on arts and culture organizations. Here, for instance, we see the beginning of a long list of cultural organizations in Jackson, MS.

Charitable Statistics Directory: www.nccs.urban.org

GuideStar: www.guidestar.org

THE OTHER REALLY BIG DATA SOURCE.

So, yes, there's a huge number of national resources out there about local culture, but not surprisingly many of our survey recommended that some of the greatest local knowledge ... is going to be found locally.

We already mentioned that the U.S. Census was the most frequently cited important data source for cultural asset mapping. #2 was members of your own community.

Local artists, grassroots leaders, local officials, nonprofit workers – they all have perspective about what makes a community distinct.

One of the most frequent pieces of advice we received was to capture community insights within your asset mapping project.

4. ACTIVE COMMUNITY INTEREST
3. RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS
2. AMPLE TIME
1. HUMAN RESOURCES / STAFFING

So that brings us to our third topic – getting people engaged.

When we asked our survey respondents what resources an organization needed for their cultural asset mapping process to be meaningful, all of the top responses had at least something to do with community engagement.

They told us that you need active community interest in the process, with participation in and outside of the arts. You need resources on hand to address participation barriers. You need lots of time for facilitating community input and relationship-building. And you need sufficient staffing for different elements of the process, including extensive community outreach.

“WHILE RELATIONSHIPS ARE OFTEN AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT ASSETS, THEY ARE INVISIBLE OR TAKEN FOR GRANTED. A BROAD ARRAY OF CULTURAL PRACTICES, ESPECIALLY RELATED TO FOOD, THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC AND FAMILY CELEBRATIONS CAN BE IMPORTANT ASSETS AND ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED.”

**- TOM BORRUP, PH.D., PRINCIPAL,
CREATIVE COMMUNITY BUILDERS**

They noted that community engagement was one of the most important parts of cultural asset mapping – but also that getting people engaged in a meaningful way is one of the biggest challenges.

WHO PARTICIPATES?

So let's dive into how to address this issue.

When we asked them about what their preferred cultural asset mapping approach, we also asked them if it worked well for engaging any particular type of community stakeholder. Given that they had preferences for different types of approaches, it's not surprising that they also had different target groups in mind.

They shared that particular methodologies worked well for artists and non-artists, for youths and seniors, for residents and research experts, and for grassroots leadership and public officials.

For me, the important takeaway here is that cultural asset mapping can be an engaging experience for people from a broad range of backgrounds.

YOUTHS

SENIORS

YOUNG ADULTS

PARENTS

SMALL BUSINESSPEOPLE

TEACHERS

HOUSING ADVOCATES

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS

CLERGY MEMBERS

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Of course, that doesn't mean that every approach is going to be equally engaging for everybody.

We also asked survey respondents who *doesn't* typically get engaged – who can get overlooked in cultural asset mapping processes.

The most frequently noted were members of certain age groups, with community youths and seniors mentioned most often. People of certain occupational groups were also often cited – including individual artists, with some people noting that participation from the arts community tends to come more from staff at arts nonprofits.

And they also noted that communities of color and indigenous communities tended to be underrepresented in cultural asset mapping.

HOW STAKEHOLDERS GET ENGAGED.

And what about how people get engaged? They noted a variety of entry points to participation.

A particular stakeholder group might be the audience for the final product that comes out of an asset mapping project. They might be engaged later in the project to offer their feedback on the findings. They might be active participants earlier in the process – as focus group participants, as survey respondents or as arts project participants. Or they might be active collaborators – as paid research collaborators, as leaders of a steering committee or as community organizers or programmers.

“USUALLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE CULTURAL MAPS HAVE A BROAD COMMUNITY BUY-IN – NOT JUST ARTISTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS BUT ALSO OTHER COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS ... THE EARLIER THEY ARE INVOLVED, THE BETTER THE CHANCE THERE IS OF UNCOVERING A WIDE RANGE OF CULTURAL ASSETS, INCLUDING ‘HIDDEN ONES’ ... THAT ARE NOT ALWAYS ON THE RADAR.”

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

What we heard frequently was that successful cultural asset mapping typically has at least *some* degree of community engagement – that top-down cultural asset mapping can overlook assets that are important on a grassroots level and can offer less opportunities for taking advantage of the learning that comes out of the process.

In the end, who’s engaged – and when and how they’re engaged – depends at least somewhat on what approaches you’re employing, and that’s again influenced by the overall mission of your project. Our advice here is simply that you take the time to plan out your participation strategy early on.

By having at least a general sense of what groups you want to target for participation; what you want to learn from them; and what you want *them* to gain from participating, you’ll have a clearer sense of direction as the process unfolds.

TIME FOR RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING
COMFORTABLE MEETING SETTINGS
CONVENIENT LOCATIONS
SNACKS AND MEALS
CHILDCARE
YOUTH PROGRAMMING

TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE
PARTICIPATION STIPENDS
JARGON-FREE LANGUAGE
ACCESSIBLE ACTIVITIES
TRANSLATION SERVICES
MULTILINGUAL OUTREACH

Of course, it probably goes without saying that part of that planning needs to focus on barriers that might exist for these target groups to participate in cultural asset mapping – or to community planning in general. Doing so can be resource- and time-intensive, but it also will likely to lead to a much richer project.

Taking the time to build one-on-one relationships, to acknowledge community tensions and to make sure participants understand the purposes and expected outcomes of asset mapping are key to building trust and buy-in. Holding meetings in comfortable spaces, located in close proximity to where participants live, is key to addressing feelings of discomfort in attending a meeting. Making sure participants get fed and have childcare – or youth programming is part of an event – can help counter feelings of time scarcity.

Addressing transportation and providing stipends to participants can help to reduce financial barriers. Paying stipends to artists and grassroots leaders for their assistance can also show that you value their contributions in the community. And avoiding jargon, creating accessible ways to share thoughts and investing in translation services and multilingual outreach materials can help to reduce language barriers.



We've seen some really interesting examples of how organizations have made addressing these kinds of barriers a key part of the asset mapping project itself.

In Broken City Lab's project "How to Forget the Border Completely", the organization was working to draw attention to the fact that Windsor's and Detroit's fates are very connected – despite being separated by an international border crossing.

So they made the barrier of crossing that border part of the project. They provided micro-grants, in the form of a free roundtrip cross-border bus ticket, to any participants who wanted to explore culture on the other side of the border. In exchange, participants just had to write a story about the experience they ultimately had on the other side of the border. These stories then were integrated into a book about the two cities' joint culture.

Broken City Lab: www.brokencitylab.org

How to Forget the Border Completely: www.blurb.ca/b/2884324

HOW WILL THE CULTURAL MAPPING PROCESS, IN AND OF ITSELF, BE MEANINGFUL TO MY COMMUNITY?

This example points to another key point that we hope you'll take away from today – making sure that the cultural mapping process is meaningful ... even if it doesn't lead to any immediate new initiatives or investments in the community.

Hopefully, cultural asset mapping will have long-term benefits for your community. But I'd argue that one of the biggest barriers to people participating in community planning is the feeling that their contribution doesn't have any real – or immediately apparent – value.

So thinking about how the process can be financially rewarding or can produce a community keepsake or can even just make people feel like their voices have been heard – that's key.

PROJECT WILLOWBROOK



In Project Willowbrook, for instance, a bilingual book of community stories is serving double-duty – as a cultural asset guide to the neighborhood and as a keepsake that chronicles community voices and experiences.

Project Willowbrook: www.lacountyarts.org/willowbrook/

HIDDEN GEMS OF THE TENDERLOIN



In a number of Wildflowers Institute projects, where participants are encouraged to build and describe a model of their community using action figures, video of participant sessions drives home just how meaningful the experience is. You can visually see the difference as people become more comfortable sharing their thoughts about their community.

Wildflowers Institute: www.wildflowers.org

WHERE DO I FIND THE ARTISTS IN MY COMMUNITY?

But before we move on to the panel discussion, we want to spend just a few minutes looking at an example of how all these elements together can help you find a particular kind of cultural asset.

In this case, I'm going to focus in on a cultural asset that a lot of people say can be difficult to locate – a community's individual artists.

“LOCAL INDEPENDENT ARTISTS MAY BE HARD TO INCLUDE BECAUSE THEY MAY NOT BE TAPPED INTO ARTS ORGANIZATIONS, PARTICULARLY AS SOME MAY NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES ARTISTS BUT MORE TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMAKERS.”

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

Artists can be elusive – particularly because they don’t always call themselves artists.

But let’s think about where we can find them. Ultimately, the best way to uncover artists is probably going to be in substantial conversations with community participants.

But we can do some preliminary research to help narrow the search.

Again, we can look to see whether someone’s already done work to identify them. We can reach out to a local or state arts agency to see if they have a directory of local artists. We can reach out to a local college or university to see if they have a publicly available alumni directory that can point us to graduates in arts fields.

We can turn to our national data sets to get a better sense of what kinds of art occupations are dense in our community. For instance, you can use Bureau of Labor Statistics data to develop location quotients. We’re not going to get into the specifics of location quotients here, but they’re a pretty straightforward way to find out what creative industries are competitive in your community. Industries that have particularly strong local employment have a location quotient above 1, while industries with lower employment levels compared to other parts of the country have a location quotient of less than 1.

By creating location quotients for arts-related industries, you can hone in on the places in your community where you'd expect to find particularly large densities of artists - places like fine art schools or museums or sound recording businesses.

We can pull a list of arts, culture and humanities organizations in our community from a national directory and reach out to those organizations to see what artists they work with.

And we can reach out to non-arts organizations to find out what artists they work with. Non-arts organizations sometimes get overlooked, but places of worship, schools, hospitals and small businesses often have some kinds of community arts programming being led by local artists.

And as simple as it sounds, you can just start asking people that you already serve if they do anything artistic – in whatever kind of artistic medium, regardless of whether they earn income from it or not. If you already have sign-in sheets at community meetings –or any other kind of standardized way that your organization collects contact information, adding an “artist” checkbox is an easy way to get a list going.

Further into the process, once you have an initial list of artists in your community, you might also consider offering micro-grants. Providing a small financial incentive can help to bring forward artists who might not otherwise self-identify or might not be in your immediate network. And often, artist stipends can have broader benefits. You could pay artists to help you capture stories; to perform outside of community meeting rooms to draw in bigger audiences; to assist with design or photography work; or to launch their own small-scale asset mapping projects that can feed into your larger effort.

“WORK WITH ARTISTS BUT DON’T LIMIT YOURSELF TO ARTISTS.”

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

That’s just one set of strategies for drawing out information about one type of cultural asset.

The beauty of cultural asset mapping is that there’s so much flexibility in how you approach it. You can very easily create a customized strategy tailored specifically to your community’s needs.

**“THINK HARD ABOUT WHY YOU’RE DOING THE MAPPING AND
CREATE THE LARGE VISION THAT WILL BRING RESOURCES
TOGETHER THAT WILL ENABLE FOLLOW-THROUGH.”**

**– SABRINA V. PRATT, OWNER,
SVPRATT CREATIVE STRATEGIES**

Of course, that’s the challenge of cultural asset mapping, too. Without a strong sense of purpose, something so broad can go in a million different directions.

“TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT, START DRAWING LINES AND CONNECTING DOTS BETWEEN ASSETS TO SEE WHAT’S HAPPENING, WHAT COULD HAPPEN AND WHERE YOUR ORGANIZATION COULD SUPPORT STRONGER CONNECTIONS.”

**– JUN-LI WANG, ARTIST COMMUNITY ORGANIZER,
SPRINGBOARD FOR THE ARTS**

But we hope that this presentation demonstrates to you that you have company in that journey. Cultural asset mapping is solidifying into a really strong field of practice, and as the 62 experts who weighed in on this presentation highlight, it’s a field that’s very open to sharing ideas, advice and a shoulder to lean on.