



Resource A: Community engagement and community asset mapping¹

A brief overview of community engagement

Community centred ways of working are recognised as sustainable and effective approaches to help reduce health inequalities. Communities are one of the key stakeholders in whole systems work, with expertise in what people in the community want, how they think, what they consider to be their assets and how efforts to intervene might be made more effective. Communities are usually thought of in terms of place (for example, a ward or a housing estate) or interest (for example, faith groups). One of the key challenges of community engagement is accessing people not represented by these traditional communities and there are a few suggestions for how to tackle this below. It's also worth remembering that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) are only a partial representation of local communities.

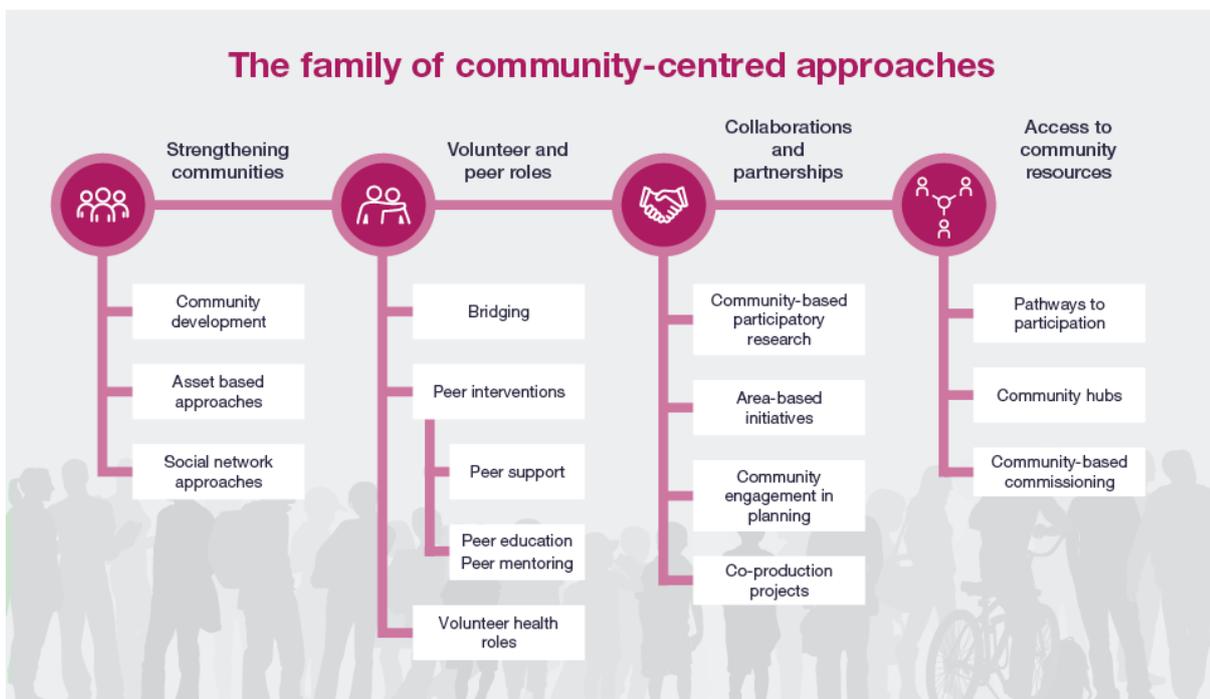
The type and intensity of community involvement work at the outset of whole systems obesity work is hugely varied and heavily dependent on the local context, on the history of community engagement approaches in the area and the level of expertise and funding available. The 'family' of community engagement activities is one way of organising some of the many possible approaches and have been well-received by local authorities and partners ([figure 1](#))(1, 2).

It is good practice to think carefully about the exact role community representatives will play at each stage and to agree the limits of these roles, so that expectations are realistic. It is also important to respect the extent to which communities would like to be involved. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) community engagement: improving health and wellbeing quality standard is a useful reference for local authorities(3). This guidance recommends that:

¹ This resource is part of Public Health England's wider whole systems approach to obesity programme. Please search to find the main guide and additional resources.

- members of the local community are involved in **identifying the skills, knowledge, networks, relationships and facilities** (that is, assets) available to health and wellbeing initiatives (phase 1, 2 and 3)
- members of the local community are involved in **setting priorities** for health and wellbeing initiatives (phase 1 and 4)
- members of the local community are involved in **monitoring and evaluating** health and wellbeing initiatives as soon as priorities are agreed (phase 6)

Figure 1: The ‘family’ of community engagement approaches (2)



A sensible approach would be to start by developing an understanding of your local context to help you plan effective community engagement in your area. This can be brief and could include:

- the history of community engagement in your area
- existing projects involving the community, and their strengths and weaknesses
- the quality of the relationship between local authority/council and residents
- the skills, knowledge and resources (human, financial, other) available, within the local authority and its various partners, to carry out community engagement work

Mapping community assets

Why community assets matter

All communities have assets that can support health and wellbeing ([figure 2](#)). Some of these assets will be well-known to professionals from the local authority and its various NHS, VCS and other partners, examples include physical resources and facilities such as schools, parks, GP practices, community centres.

Figure 2: Infographic showing types of community assets (2)



It is likely you may need community engagement to help identify other assets, such as the skills, knowledge and commitment of individuals in the community. Recognising and identifying these assets can help build on particular strengths of communities. Involving and empowering local communities, in particular disadvantaged groups, can better reflect the local realities and through a greater level of understanding and expertise, can help improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

Points to consider when asset mapping

- it is an incremental process. New assets will emerge as work progresses
- it can be used as a tool to engage community members
- it is a potential way of engaging the 'unusual suspects' (those considered hard-to-reach), using simple creative and social research methods (see below)

- it is a potential way to identify important people in a community who may not hold formal positions of power or influence

“Assessing a community's assets means identifying, supporting, and mobilising existing community resources and capacities for the purpose of creating and achieving a shared vision. In the process of doing a self-assessment, community members also identify problems and obstacles that must be addressed in order to achieve their assessment dream of a healthy community. An assets orientation does not imply ignoring problems and needs or throwing out rational planning [...] in both needs-focused and assets-focused approaches, hard realities must be faced”(4).

Summary of how to map community assets

The following are some steps to support the creation of a local community asset map.

1. Define community boundaries. Geographical boundaries of cities or towns do not always reflect residents' perceptions of their community or neighbourhood. Decide which streets or landmarks are your boundaries. Involve your partnership and residents to make these decisions.
2. Identify and involve partners, including community representatives. It is important to involve a range of people and organisations that have different community networks and knowledge about the local area (its resources, residents, assets and issues).
3. Determine what type of assets to include. There are lots of different types of assets, as listed above. You may wish to identify specific skills or assets needed to address the issue on which you are focusing. Link your purpose with the kinds of assets you want to identify.
4. List the assets of groups. Make an inventory of all the groups (associations, organisations, and institutions) in your community. Use your partnerships and local people to help create and add to your list, followed by other useful sources of information, such as Chamber of Commerce, and local service directories.

5. You may want to list the assets of individuals, however, identifying individual assets works best when working with a small community. Some of this information may be easily and readily available from key stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the community and its residents. You might also wish to develop a survey to identify individual assets. However, surveying the community in such a way is expensive and time-consuming.
6. Organise the assets on a map using a key to identify different assets and review and update this map with wider stakeholders and local people to identify gaps.

This information will be useful in a number of ways. Firstly, it may support wider community engagement and involvement in the whole systems approach either through insights or involvement in the systems network. Secondly, during the later stages of the process, when describing the local picture to stakeholders in workshop 2 (phase 4), when agreeing an action plan (phase 5) and when supporting the action plan refinement (reflect and refresh) (phase 6).

Some suggested tools for asset mapping

Identifying physical assets

PHE's Strategic Health Asset Planning and Evaluation (SHAPE) tool is a free, online resource providing information on health, social care, education, transport and other physical assets. The tool is free (you need to register first) and can be accessed online at: <https://shapeatlas.net>.

Creative techniques to engage communities in mapping assets

Various creative techniques have been used to engage community members in mapping assets. These can include examples such as drawing, writing, filming, modelling, stories, photos and audio. One local authority printed physical maps and asked residents to mark assets with sticky tack and string.

Techniques borrowed from social science

Focus groups, interviews and surveys are all potentially useful ways of identifying assets. Members of your stakeholder team are likely to have experience in one or more of these areas, which could be useful when planning your asset mapping.

Other techniques

Walking, cycling and driving tours are potentially engaging ways of identifying assets with community members. Some people organise events, festivals or street parties to meet people and obtain their views. Techniques need not be limited to those listed here, you can draw on your own experience and creativity.

References

1. Public Health England. A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing. 2015.
2. Public Health England. Health matters: community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing [Internet]2018. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-health-and-wellbeing-community-centred-approaches/health-matters-community-centred-approaches-for-health-and-wellbeing>.
3. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Community engagement: improving health and wellbeing. 2017.
4. Sharpe PA, Greaney, M.L, Lee, P.R. and Royce, S.W. Asset-oriented community development Public Health Report. 2000;115(2-3):205-11.