



Utilizing Community Assets

Overview: Attitudes toward service in general affect the success of service efforts. The term "service" implies something given out or an action taken for a particular purpose. What that commodity is, how it is given, and the intentions behind the "service" greatly affect the quality of the action. Through a series of reflective and introspective activities, participants will explore social and personal attitudes towards service—specifically, the importance of empowerment-based attitudes and processes to successful service. The workshop ends with reflections on how to start and maintain community partnerships on the appropriate foot. Minimum group size: 10

Category: Community context and engagement; asset-mapping; impact

Level: Moderate to Advanced

Type: Structured experiential education lesson plan, suitable for an uninterrupted workshop format.

Focus or Goals of This Guide:

- To recognize the benefits of asset-based approaches in a variety of service efforts.
- To learn to use the ROUR strategy for asset-based approaches.
- To learn tools for coordinating asset-based service efforts.

Materials:

- Flip chart or chalk/Marker Board
- Note cards (one per participant)
- A highlighter and pen
- Red and blue markers

- Bags of individually-wrapped candy (one bag per five participants)
- Prop table and various props

How to Prepare:

The purpose of this activity is to create a virtual community of assets, then challenge the participants to use some or all of those assets to solve a problem.

Create two problems that require several pieces of information to solve. The problem's complexity should reflect the ability level of the group.

An algebraic example—The equation “ $A = x(y+z)$ ” can be divided into separate equations with varying levels of difficulty:

SIMPLE:	$x = 6, y = 2, z = 7$
MODERATE:	$x = 6, y = x - 2, z = y$
COMPLEX:	$x = 6, z = qr, y = x - 2, q = y, r = 3$

For each problem: Count out one note card for each participant. On the first card, write the problem in black ink. On the second card, write a relevant component of the problem in black ink. On the others, writing some in **red** ink and others in **blue** ink write **a**) the remaining relevant components of the problem, and **b**) pieces of information that are unrelated to the problem—they may be misleading, completely unrelated, (e.g. Variables not germane to solving the original algebraic equation). The facilitator should work to ensure a roughly equal proportion of relevant to irrelevant cards.

However, the problem does not have to be mathematical. Any problem, including a logic problem, a problem related to community service, a problem dealing with people, etc. is appropriate. See Appendix for more detailed suggestions of problems the participants can solve.

Set up a Prop Table containing the bags of candy and other sundry items. The table should be readily accessible to the group.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

The outline for this workshop includes activities for 1.5 hours, which can be modified.

1) Warm up	suggested time 15 minutes
2) Game #1	suggested time 20 minutes (Depends on group size)
3) ROUR Discussion/Reflection	suggested time 30 minutes
4) Suggested Problem #2 time:	suggested time 15 minutes (Depends on group size)
5) Debrief	suggested time 10 minutes (Depends on group size)

1 Warm Up

Suggested time 10 minutes

Since this training begins with an exercise that requires interpersonal interaction, a warm-up exercise should help you and the participants get to know each other's names and/or interests and create a mood conducive to discussion and introspection. Use an icebreaker you like, so long as it does *not* emphasize teamwork.

2 Game #1 Directions

Suggested time: 10 minutes

This is *not* a teambuilding exercise. Before beginning, the group should understand that they should act as individuals for the duration of the exercise. You may also want to include a framing quote, such as: "You can take a community as far as they want to go, not as far as you want them to go." --Jeanette Rankin, first woman in Congress

Designate one participant the "Project Coordinator" (PC), who will have the note card containing the problem. The PC will be the only person allowed to converse during the exercise. Nobody else should talk, unless the PC asks him/her a direct question, and in that case the person addressed should respond *only* to that question.

The PC should also be given complete control over the props on the table. The PC will be given the bags of candy, if he or she succeeds in solving the problem correctly. Until then, everything on the table should be considered communal property.

NOTE: For the purposes of this activity, it is advisable that the PC not have a special skill or gift that might help them solve the problem on their own. If the exercise requires extensive interaction, the facilitator will have more fodder for discussion and reflection later on. (e.g. Following the algebra example, the facilitator might choose someone other than a physics major or an accountant.)

Explain that everyone will receive a special note card that may or may not provide clues for the PC to solve his or her problem. When they first receive their cards, they should cover or hide it so that **nobody else may see it**. When this is clear, pass out the cards.

Instruct the people given cards with **red** ink writing to hold their card so that other people can read it.

People with **blue** writing should look at the card and remember what it says, but should keep making sure not to show it to anyone. They may repeat the information to the PC if asked.

One person, besides the PC, received a **highlighted pen ink** card containing a crucial piece of information to solving the problem. The person who has this card should hold it

face down against their chest. Whenever asked about their card, this person should *not* be truthful. If the PC does not solve the problem in time, this person will receive the candy on the table.

Remind the group that this is *not* a teambuilding exercise. Nobody is required to help. Nobody is allowed to talk, except to answer a direct question from the PC. When all this is clear, pass out the note cards.

The PC will have three minutes to begin working on the problem. At this point, the facilitator should ask probing questions to the PC.

**Who did you first approach? Why them?
Who didn't you approach? Why not?**

No one should offer suggestions, including the facilitator. Repeat the above cycle every two minutes, asking questions that probe the four aspects of asset-based problem-solving strategy: *Recognize* assets, *Organize* them, *Utilize* them, and *Reciprocate* their energies. Below are example questions in boldface, and their relationship to ROUR in parenthesis:

- **Who has been the least helpful so far?** (Have you recognized/organized them?)
- **Who has been most helpful?** (What have you done to reciprocate?)
- **What is your course of action?** (Have you organized them in your own mind?)
- **Does everyone understand your plan of action? What have you done to inform them?** (Do your assets know they're organized?)
- **What are you doing to make sure that everyone is helpful?** (How are you reciprocating?)
- **Who do you suspect holds the other highlighted ink card? Why?** (Have you adequately recognized your assets?)
- **Do you think that anyone else knows who holds the highlighted ink card?** (Are your assets organized? Are you utilizing them effectively?)
- **Would you like to make any general announcements to the group at this point?** (Would you like to organize your assets?)

The exercise is over when one or more of the following occurs:

- 1) The PC succeeds,
- 2) The PC has demonstrated enough fodder for a discussion on the ROUR strategy, or
- 3) 5 minutes (or equivalent for your size group) is up.

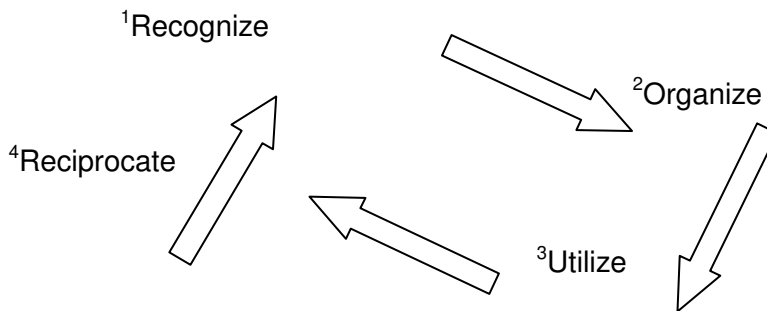
Variations: *If the group is very large, the facilitator may choose to split it into multiple groups or create more than one problem for the whole group and designate two Project Coordinators.*

3 Discussion: ROUR Asset-Based Strategizing

Suggested time 30 minutes

At this point, the facilitator should show the flip chart diagram of the ROUR strategy (See Appendix). What follows are notes of a step-by-step discussion about the four stages of ROUR asset-based strategizing. Make sure the group understands that although the ROUR strategy is most easily understood as a process that can be addressed one step at a time, real life is not quite that simple. However, by reflecting on each step, we can better understand the situations and challenges in which we find ourselves on a daily basis.

Tell the group that, at the end of each stage, you will ask the group to reflect on the game they just played.



Recognize

“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.”
--Anais Nin

“The reason you don’t understand me Edith, is because I’m talking to you in English and you’re listenin’ to me in Dingbat!”
--Archie Bunker

You’d have to know what materials were available before you could build a sound building. The same holds true for program development. Often, we can feel deprived of materials and support in certain situations. Careful observation and resourcefulness can help increase your materials, your support, and your success. This is the basis of Asset-based strategies.

Success depends upon our ability to **RECOGNIZE** as many assets as possible in a given situation. Think about the exercise in which you just participated. Discuss the following with your group:

- **What assets did your PC identify in the last exercise?**
- How were they used?
- **What are some your PC overlooked or decided not to pursue?**
- How could they have been used?

There are many kinds of assets, but for our purposes, they can be classified into two categories: Personal, and Organizational:

ORGANIZATIONAL: These may include the influence of a united voice, networks of individuals, the credibility of combined expertise, diversity of thought and approach, inherent collaborative tendencies, and clear missions or goals.

PERSONAL: These are assets based on individual abilities or connections. They may include talents, proficiencies (e.g. math, writing, physical strength), expertise, possessions, ideas and personal drive.

These types are clearly related: All organizations utilize relationships to succeed; these relationships depend on people. No individual can truly live outside of the structure of organizations.

ASSET-BASED strategies depend on individuals!!!

With these things in mind:

- **What are some assets the individual group members withheld?**
- Did the individuals withhold the asset of working as a group? Why?
- **What are some group assets that the group, as a whole, could have offered?**
- Given the rules of the game, who was responsible for accessing those assets?
- **What strategies could the PC employ to make that happen?**

Organize

“It is not enough to understand what we ought to be, unless we know what we are.”
-- T.S. Eliot

“You can take a community as far as they want to go, not as far as you want them to go.” --Jeanette Rankin, first woman in Congress

At this point in the ROUR strategy, you have a goal and a list of assets that will help you reach that goal. Next, you must organize your assets and form a plan. Creating a plan from your own or your organization’s perspective often seems intuitive. However, asset-based strategies are *community driven*. As the quote points out, ‘you can only take a community as far as they want to go....’ Successful activities make everyone feel **Interested, Included and Invaluable**.

The **BIG THREE** to remember:

- 1) Appeal to peoples’ interests
- 2) Make sure everyone understands and agrees on the big picture
- 3) Make sure everyone has a role to play and knows each others’ roles

With these things in mind:

- **Does everyone know his or her role? Is everyone inclined to perform it?**
- **Were there any roles you would have liked to perform?**

- **Did everyone know the PC's plan? Was this helpful or not?**

Utilize

"The greatest virtues are those which are most useful to other people."
--Aristotle

"Past the beggar and the suffering walk he who asks, 'Why, oh God, do you not do something for these people?' To which God replied, 'I did do something—I made you.'"
-- Old Sufi saying

Now on to the key step: making it happen.

What is the difference between Utilization and Implementation?

Note that this step is not called "Implementation." Ask the group why they think that is.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition:

Implement—v. "To put into effect"

Utilize—v. "To put to use"

Why might the terminology be important here?

Through discussion, the facilitator should try to flush out the idea that strong communities put their assets to use. A community's assets are the basis for effective programs and plans—*you utilize assets in order to implement plans*. The term "Utilize" is one of empowerment: use what you have for positive gain. As long as you focus on utilizing assets, you will not lose sight of the true Web of Community.

With these things in mind:

- **Who in the group felt empowered to solve the problem?** (Besides the PC?)
- **What could the PC have done to make this a group effort?**

Reciprocate

"How many people did you help make happy today? Was one of them you?"
--Sherry Whitlow, Volunteer Coordinator, Arthur Edwards Elementary School, North Carolina
Reciprocate

Discuss with the group: Are you part of the community where you serve? How well do you understand it? How well do you contribute to its welfare (emphasize quality of work, as well as quantity of volunteers or hours)?

Reciprocation, a mutual give-and-take, means building ties **with and among the community**.

The ROUR strategy is community-based approach. The stronger your ties with the community, the better your program will be. The strategy has two major components: recognizing assets, and being an asset.

Ask the group for examples:

- What can you do to recognize your community partners for their contributions?
- What can you do to make sure your community partners are assets to one another, not just to your program?

Among the results of a successfully implemented ROUR strategy are community empowerment, grass roots optimism and enthusiasm, and positive results.

Explain that the basis for the ROUR strategy is Assets. Success depends on your ability to recognize and harness them.

4 Activity Directions: Game #2

Suggested time 15 minutes

Explain to the group that they will have an opportunity to try “The Real World” again, this time using the four components of the ROUR strategy. Remind them that this is *not* a teambuilding exercise, and that they should act as individuals for the duration. A new PC may be chosen, if desired.

- See Addendum for additional information on this scenario.
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5 Reflection/Debrief

Suggested time 10 minutes

Ask the group to gather so that they can see one another—in a circle or group facing one another. The facilitator may discuss some of the following questions, or ask everyone to think of one way they can improve their programs at home, so that they better take advantage of aspect(s) of the ROUR strategy. If appropriate, pass out the remaining candy to the rest of the group.

Ask the PC:

- What was the easiest part of this exercise? The most challenging?
- Did you use any components of the ROUR strategy? Which ones, and how? Did they work? Why or why not?

Ask everyone:

- Did everyone in the group understand how the PC came to his or her solution?
- Which participants received the most attention from the PC? The least attention?
- Which participants wanted to coach the PC or otherwise contribute to solving the problem?
- What did you learn from this activity?
- How are you going to change your future approach?

APPENDIX #1 Sample Game Problem: Creating an Advisory Board

Problem: You've got a great idea for a service-learning program at the local Community Rec. Center, but you want to have its own office at M.Y. University and a part-time graduate student assistantship. The MYU President has said that if you can found an advisory board within one month (20 minutes), she will provide funding for an office and staff. In order to have the clout both with the University and the community in which your program operates, your Advisory Board must have at least the following: A business executive, a politician, the Rec. Center Director, two students and two faculty members. Find them, before the president withdraws her offer.

CARDS:

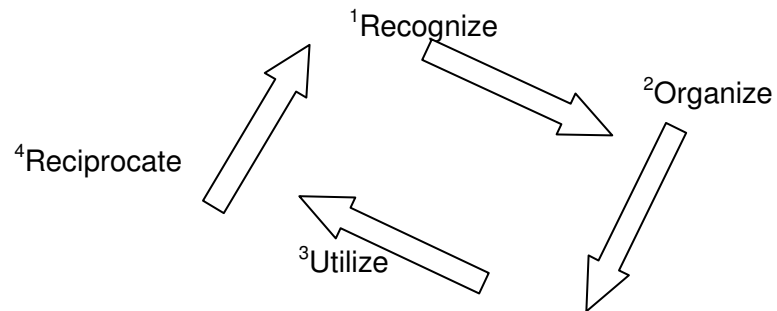
- 1 You are an Advertising Executive in a major firm. One of your biggest clients may go under because business has been scared away ever since the local news did a feature series about unruly youth in the neighborhood.
- 2 You are a lead consultant for Weer Consultants, Inc., and you specialize in non-profit management. You don't think you have time to be a part of the Advisory Board, because you spend your spare time with your only son, playing little league sports at the Rec. Center adjacent to MYU.
- 3 You are the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation for the city. You work twelve-hour days and don't have time for extra-curricular activities, but you have a hard time saying "no."
- 4 You are the district representative to the U.S. House of Representatives. You love good publicity and spread yourself pretty thin in order to get it.
- 5 You are the representative for a ward on the opposite side of the city as the Rec. Center.
- 6 You volunteer as the Rec. Center director. Half of your day, you spend with neighborhood residents and kids at the Center. The other half a day, you spend at home working as a web page designer.
- 7 You are the chair of the city's AFL-CIO chapter. You work with labor groups to ensure fair treatment of the city's workers.
- 8 You are a professor of economics and prefer to be alone most of the time, but you try not to offend people by letting them know that.
- 9 You are a professor of English and volunteer regularly with Habitat.
- 10 You are a professor of civil engineering and think service learning is great.

- 11 You are a professor of philosophy and enjoy fishing in your spare time.
- 12 You are an undergraduate student majoring in communications and physics, and you volunteer regularly with Habitat.
- 13 You are a physics teacher at the high school adjacent to the Rec. Center. Most of your classes are at the end of the day, and you have a hard time keeping kids attention, because they always seem to be looking forward to playing sports at the Center.
- 14 You are a graduate student in Sociology. You've always wanted to run your own community service program. In the evenings you coach little league baseball.

APPENDIX #2 – ROUR Flip Chart Diagram

ROUR

AN ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP STRATEGY



¹RECOGNIZE the Assets!

ORGANIZATIONAL & PERSONAL

²ORGANIZE the Assets!

The **BIG THREE** to remember:

- 1) Appeal to peoples' interests
- 2) Make sure everyone understands and agrees on the big picture
- 3) Make sure everyone has a role to play and knows each others' roles

³UTILIZE the Assets!

UTILIZE ≠ IMPLEMENT

⁴RECIPROCATE the Assets!

- 1) Be an ASSET to others and to the common goal
- 2) Recognize assets publicly

BE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY!!!