



Leveraging Assets for Innovation

The fourth Capacity of Conscious Social Change is Engaging Mindfully. Our key question here is “What is helpful?” We do not impose our agenda on others, but explore and codesign solutions collectively, exploring where we can contribute in a way that is most helpful to the common good. The fifth Capacity of Conscious Social Change is to Lead from Within. The key question under this capacity is “What is possible?” This involves listening for the things that you are passionate about, that you feel called to do and then learning how to use those gifts and passions to make a positive difference or transformation. Tapping into your personal gifts or assets will enable you to see what tools you have to use to solve the problems you have identified as a priority. By coming from a place of inner strength, you will be more likely to generate solutions that you will find inspiring and meaningful to pursue. Having understood the gifts, capabilities and assets you bring to a solution, you will be more likely to design solutions which will be sustainable long-term, and which will inspire others.

To begin to cultivate the capacity to create transformation or to design new consciousness-based solutions, the next step is to identify your community’s collective passions, gifts and other assets, and leverage as many of them as possible to create positive change. This process can be used with youth, educators, organization staff, community activists, and change agents as a way of reenergizing the creative-problem solving process. For early-stage change agents or communities who have yet to determine how best to intervene, the first objective of this exercise is to help participants recognize their strengths and passions as tools to apply toward positive change. The second objective is to release the creative ideas of the collective.

Map Assets

Use a large piece of paper taped to the wall or a white board or chalkboard so that you can conduct this activity with your entire group. You may want to set rules about respect and support prior to beginning the exercise. Ensure all members contribute. Some people may disagree on what is a gift, but include anything that someone feels is positive, even if someone else may disagree. For example, there may be someone who is very good at talking – one person may see that this is a gift for circumstances when negotiation or public speaking is needed, even if someone else honors quiet humility. Use the following steps to help you compile this list:

Step 1: Identify Internal Assets - Passions:

Make one list of all the things that you have individually as gifts. Consider the following:

- What do you love to do?
- What do you really care about?
- When do you feel truly alive?
- What do you feel called to do?
- What do you like best about yourself?

Step 2: Identify Internal Assets - Skills and Competencies:

Assess the extent to which you possess specific skills. Consider the following:

- What is your knowledge expertise?
- What are key skillsets, core competencies or know-how?
- What are your gifts?
- What are your strengths?
- What have you learned to do better than others?

Step 3: Identify External Resources Available

So much of our resourcefulness and happiness depends on how we view our circumstances. Similarly, we are never as poor or without resources as we think. As you begin to identify external resources, think about how you can use these assets to advance your solution. Some resources can be used directly to help you, others can be traded or shared, and others can be leveraged to create resources. Consider the following:

- **Equipment & Tools:** Consider what type of equipment and tools you have available to you. What are the tools you use to do the things you love to do or are really good at? Be creative – what is in the natural environment? What assets do you have that can be used creatively? What does your group or other groups you belong to have? Think as broadly as you can, because there might be something you have that you never thought would be useful.
- **Technology:** What technology do you have access to? What forms of transportation can you use?
- **Space:** Consider what space you have or have access to through other groups you may belong to that might be useful.
- **Supplies:** Consider what raw material or supplies you may have or that you know are readily available – perhaps there is extra at certain times. What is the most ridiculous item you can imagine offering? What items have you created or can you create that can be used to entertain, communicate, learn, build and so-on? What does each person have that can be used to produce a product, provide a service or offer in trade of for sale?
- **Human Capital:** Who do you know who are of influence or importance? Who you can rely on for the things that you will need for your endeavor? What kind of support do you have? Who might be available to volunteer? What connections do you have to other groups or influential people? What skills, gifts and competencies do these people offer you?
- **Financial Capital:** How would you assess your existing sources of funds? What potential sources of funds might exist within your eco-system?
- **Waste:** What is wasted in your community that you can use?

As you make your list, number each of the items recorded. Record every asset you can think of. If you are facilitating a group, fill your white board or chalk board, or tape papers from a flip chart on the wall going all around the room. When you finish these steps, take a look at all the papers and honor yourselves or the group for all the amazing things you have to offer each other and their community.

Map issues

Skip if you are focused on one particular issue

Make a long list now of all the important issues the group, organization or team feels your community is facing. Be specific about the aspect of the problem that is most compelling to you. For example, rather than just say homelessness, describe instead the problem of large numbers of homeless people who are unable to find affordable housing. There is no need to debate the issue, its causes or consequences now, just list the issues. Number each of these items.

Map creative solutions

The next step is a creative brainstorm. For this kind of a process, it is important to hold a safe space open for creativity and collaborative contributions:

- Everyone is needed to participate and be creative
- The more ideas the better
- No idea should be blocked or ridiculed, criticized or judged
- All ideas are allowed, even absurd ones
- Come up with ideas that are funny and silly too
- Try not to repeat ideas

Now have someone call out one random number from each list, and read the chosen issue and asset combination out loud. Then ask the group to consider how it can use the selected asset to solve the chosen problem. Then, put the two together into a creative non-profit idea. Allow yourselves to consider at least three different ways to leverage that asset creatively in designing a social solution. All outrageous ideas are welcome to stretch the group's conception of the possible. Next, pick a new issue and pick two assets randomly. Repeat the process of employing the assets in an innovative solution to the chosen issue. Then pick a new issue and three to four assets. See what ideas can use all chosen assets or as many as possible.

For example, perhaps you pick from your list of assets a wheelbarrow. Then you pick the number from your list of issues that corresponds to domestic violence. Ask yourself how you would use a wheelbarrow to solve domestic violence. A few ideas, some of which came from a Global Grassroots session with change agents in Rwanda:

- Turn over the wheelbarrow and bang on it with sticks next to a house when you hear a man beating his wife. Use it as an alarm or drum until he stops.
- Sell the wheelbarrow and give the money to an abused woman so she can leave her abusive husband.
- Paint awareness messages on the wheelbarrow so that wherever it is used it is educating others.
- Use the wheelbarrow to do odd jobs for others to raise money for the non-profit that is fighting domestic violence.

Continue picking issues and assets and write all ideas on a large piece of paper. Allow this to continue through several pairs of assets and issues to help demonstrate that it is possible to use anything as a lever for social change. When you finish, take a look at your creative work and notice that you do not have only one tool for each major community issue, but you have all of these assets to work with in designing a solution, and even more if you engage all stakeholders in the solutions-design process.

Ideation

After completing the creative brainstorming process, begin the process of crafting your solution to your priority issue using the combined offerings of the group. Together, take a moment to breathe deeply, close your eyes, and meditate on your particular issue and passions. When you open your eyes, discuss what you each have to offer, and how you can incorporate as many assets as possible, an understanding of suffering and compassion, and mindfulness to begin to address the underlying core or root issues of your problem, mapped out comprehensively in your problem tree.

Note: You will have several other activities for deepening your solution development – this is a first-stage exploration of how to leverage assets in a range of creative interventions. These ideas will help inform the next stage. You do not need to map out a comprehensive solution at this stage.

Design an intervention

The next step is to consider solutions that will incorporate (a) as many assets as possible, (b) a compassionate understanding of the root causes of the issue and its stakeholders, (c) the use of inner-driven power (as opposed to dominant culture-determined power) and (d) Conscious Social Change approaches. As ideas are developed further, consider the ways in which you might enhance social value creation, guided by your overarching mission.

Innovation to maximize social value

Once you have an initial vision for how your solution addresses the key issue at hand, optimize it to add greater social value. Looking at your problem tree, how deep in the roots and how comprehensively across the entire system will you intervene? Who else might be helped? How could this program have greater impact in a different location? What other issues might be addressed with this methodology or program? What other levels of intervention might be necessary to alleviate an entire root? Will your solution transform belief systems and underlying assumptions? Will it address behaviors and what drives action? Will you be targeting individual actors, institutional issues or systemic inequities? Identifying one primary stakeholder and utilizing your understanding of how that stakeholder is impacted/interested/influential relevant to the issue, how many ways might you engage them across the roots?

Test, evaluate and grow with mindful engagement

It is essential to test and evaluate each component of the solution with the same level of mindfulness and deep community engagement with which the issue diagnosis was conducted. Much of the complexity of the intervention may need to be implemented over time as part of a longer-term strategy. And as is core to the philosophy of conscious social change, adjustments are made over time informed by the broader eco-system in response to what is needed to alleviate the underlying social issue without attachment to one particular agenda.

The overarching objective of this exercise is to inspire creativity and demonstrate that any one asset can be a tool to leverage for change, though our true list of assets is extensive. We are more gifted and empowered than we might at first suspect. Our potential to create change is virtually unlimited.