



Identifying Needs and Assets Through Research

How might you ensure students engage in learning that is meaningful for them and for the community? This document helps you explore the assets and needs in your community as you and your students develop and plan service-learning experiences.

Personal/Individual assets and needs

Our individual assets are our strengths — the skills and characteristics that we are proud of and that we know we're good at.

Our personal needs are skills or characteristics we would like to develop because we feel they would improve our lives.

- In the smallest circle on the next page, write two or three of your personal strengths. List these under “assets.”

Examples: “Good listener.” “Know how to put things together.”

- Also in the smallest circle, list two or three things you would like to improve about yourself. List these under “needs.”

Examples: “Public speaking ability.” “Better math grades.”

School and community assets and needs

The assets in our school community include the strengths and abilities of the individuals in that community and of the group as a whole. The resources in the school community are also assets.

The needs in our school community are the areas that could be improved for the safety or well-being of the people in the community or the facility itself.

- In the middle circle below, write down two or three strengths or resources in your school community. List these under “assets.”

Examples: “Involved parents.” “A DARE group.”

- Also in the middle circle below, write down two or three things you think could be improved at your school. List these under “needs.”

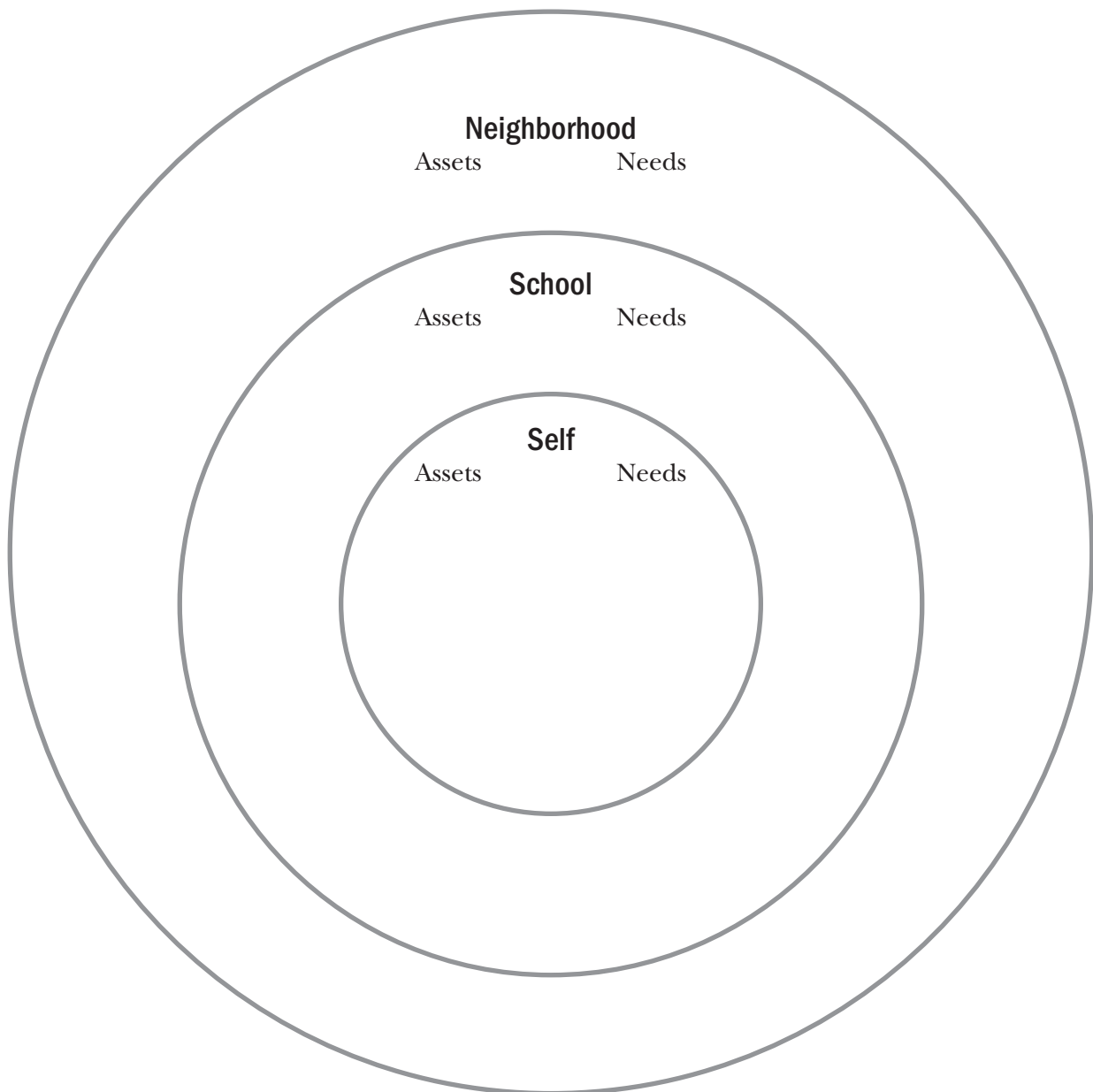
Examples: “No more bullying.” “Broken school sign.”

Larger community/neighborhood assets and needs

The assets in our neighborhood include the strengths and abilities of the individuals in that community and of the group as a whole. The resources in the neighborhood are also assets.

The needs in our neighborhood are the areas that could be improved for the safety and well-being of the people in the community or the area itself.

- Now, move to the largest circle and write down two or three strengths or resources in your community. List these under “assets.”
Examples: “Great community center.” “Neighbors who care about kids.”
- Also in the largest circle, list two or three things you think could be better in your neighborhood. List these under “needs.”
Examples: “Local park not safe at night.” “Icy sidewalks in winter.”



Once you've filled in the circle, spend some time reviewing and reflecting on them. Then, consider these questions:

Do you see similarities in the assets in yourself, your school, and your neighborhood? What about needs?

How could the various assets you identified be used to help meet the needs in your school and neighborhood?

How could your own assets be helpful in meeting these needs?

Are some of the assets groups of people who might be able to work on the needs? If so, which ones?

Also, consider sharing your list of assets and needs with your classmates. Then consider these questions:
Did you identify any of the same assets and needs? If so, which ones?

How many personal assets do you share with your classmates?

How many are different?

Ways to Identify Needs

Conduct Surveys

Students can design surveys for a variety of groups to gather information on what people see as important issues in their communities. Creating survey questions, deciding how to administer the survey, and collating the resulting information, analyzing what the data show, and deciding how to act on that data can provide important real-world experiences for students. Audiences they might consider surveying include:

- Other students in the school
- Teachers and other school staff
- Community members or community organizations

Collaborate with Existing Programs

Find a partner who is already working to address a need in your community and offer your assistance. Existing programs may have the structure, resources, and contacts to help you develop a successful project.

- Community education
- Park and recreation boards
- Service organizations such as the Kiwanis, Lions, Elks, NAACP, American Association of University Women, and more
- Department of Natural Resources
- Nonprofit organizations
- Local government agencies

Identify Key Public Issues

What are the important issues facing your city or state, nation or the world? Students can list some of these issues by reviewing headlines and articles in the local paper or other media. Comparing local headlines to national and international headlines in paper of record such as the New York Times or Washington Post can help them find issues of local and global importance, and see connections between what's happening in their community and what's happening in the rest of the world.

Conduct Interview with Local Leaders

Invite community elders and leaders into your classroom for interviews or discussions with students to explore topical areas or intergenerational or intercultural issues. Through preparing thoughtful questions, recording the information they learn, and analyzing what they've heard, students may find both areas of need they can and partners to help in their work.

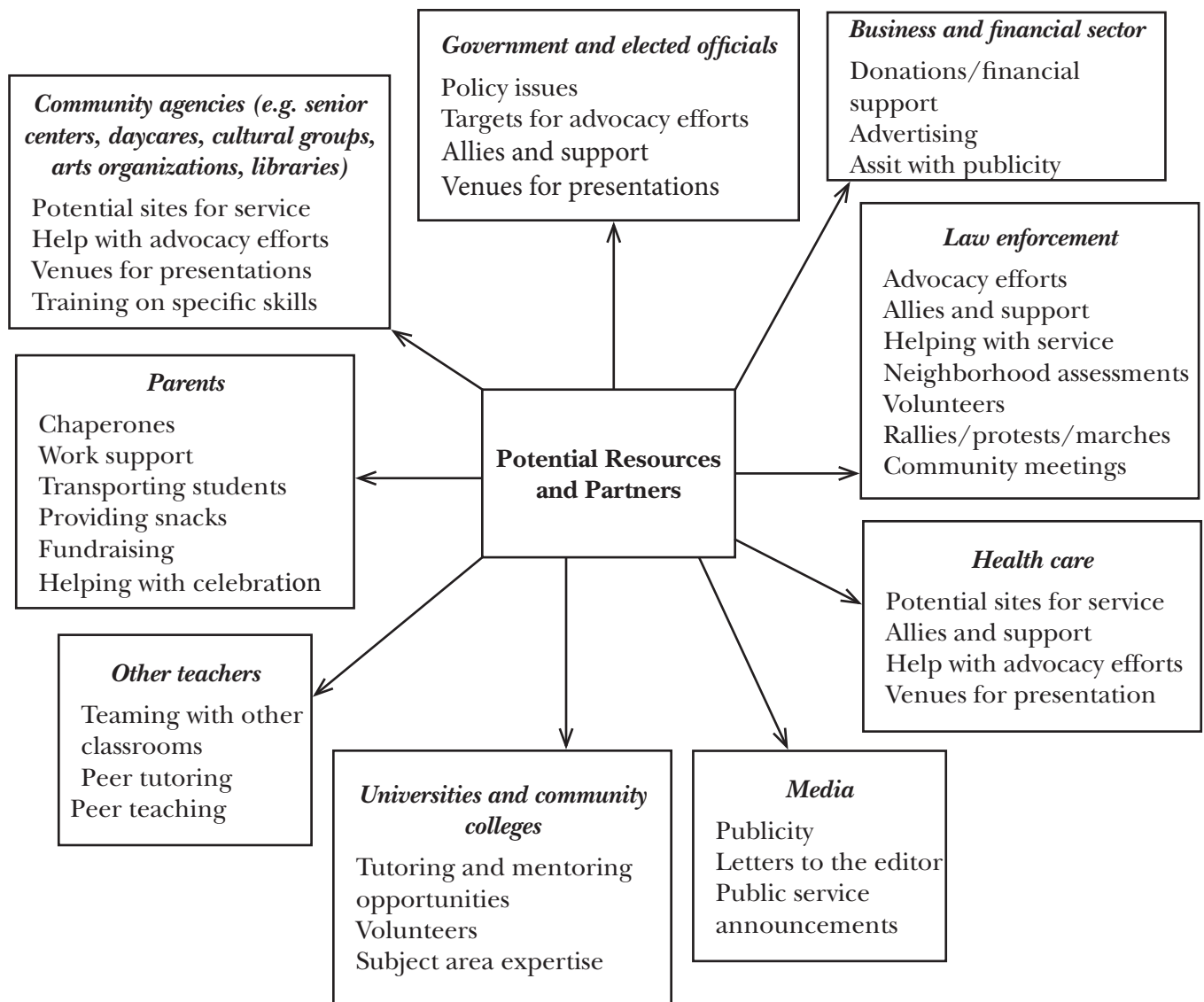
Conduct Focus Groups

Convene a small group of students, community members, and/or others and facilitate a discussion on what people see as important issues in their communities. Ask questions similar to those you would ask in a survey, but phrase them to allow more open-ended responses. Make sure not to influence the conversation, but use follow-up questions and prompts to keep discussion lively and organic. Record responses for later analysis.

Mapping Community Resources

Every community has resources available to help meet the needs of the people who live there. This handout can help you think about and locate the resources in your area. Businesses, schools, churches, organizations, and governmental bodies might be able to help you select an issue to tackle or provide resources to help you address it. Create a resource map, like the example below, to highlight potential sources of assistance.

The sample map below show some of the resource your community might have available and the kinds of support the might be able to offer your classroom. Students might want to keep this in mind as they think about their projects.



Student Skills and Interests Inventory

Understanding what students are interested in, what their strengths are, what skills they already have and what they would like to learn is important as you think about student roles in service-learning projects.

While offering students opportunities to choose how they can best contribute to a project is important in getting them engaged, it's also important to allow them opportunities to work outside of their comfort zones and try on new roles so that they can grow and stretch.

The student questionnaire below will guide students in reflecting on their skills and strengths and prompt them to think about how they learn and what areas they'd like to improve with new skills or knowledge.

My Skills and Interests

Name: _____ Age: _____

My hobbies and interests are: _____

Some day I want to be: _____

My favorite activity at school is: _____

My favorite activity at home is: _____

I know how to: _____

I am really good at: _____

An interesting thing I have done is: _____

I care for others by: _____

I think I could improve: _____

I find it difficult to: _____

I can teach others how to: _____

My best qualities are: _____

I want to learn how to: _____

I learn best when: _____