Restore Rundberg: Developing an Asset Inventory

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Kyle A Pitzer

Introduction

The Restore Rundberg Project was designed to address crime and revitalize the neighborhoods within the Rundberg area. As a component of this project, an asset inventory was created to document the resources, services, programs, and initiatives currently present in the community. It has been suggested that every community, no matter the circumstances, is home to resources and assets that can be leveraged to impact community transformation (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Flora & Flora, 2013). Employing an asset-based approach in community revitalization has also been cited as more effective, based on evidence that meaningful community change more typically occurs when community members are invested in the process (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). According to the authors, in order to catalyze this investment, resources within the community must be identified and mobilized. The internal emphasis of the asset-based approach is not meant to dismiss the importance of outside resources. It only provides a more defined and prepared framework in which to pursue and utilize external support Moving forward from this rationale, this paper presents the methods of information collection, describes the final product, and discusses the next steps for using the asset inventory as a component of the community revitalization goals.

Information Collection

The process of developing the asset inventory was two-pronged. The two approaches were reviewing relevant documents and conducting personal interviews. The first step in this case was the document study. Reviewing existing documents ensured that the work already done by the community was not duplicated. When working on this type of project, it is important to value and affirm the work that is already taking place within the community For the Rundberg area, some resources had already been surveyed and documented within neighborhood plans and directories housed by non-profit organizations. The neighborhood plans are official documents adopted by the city and developed in collaboration with community residents. Because the community played a major role in the development of the plans, they contained many community-based organizations, government departments, and built infrastructure that the community viewed as assets. These plans are also important because they serve as the foundation for all of the current work being done within the community. The majority of the content found in the asset inventory was collected in this way.

Following the document study, personal interviews were conducted to fill in gaps and collect additional resources that might not have been revealed through the document study. This could have been because they were not present or because they simply were not mentioned when the neighborhood plans were developed. Interviewees were primarily volunteers or were recommended by other community members. Announcements were made through the monthly neighborhood meetings requesting individuals who were interested in contributing to the asset inventory and several residents came forward.

The interviews were informal in that they did not follow a specific design. Interviewees were simply asked about components of their communities that they viewed as assets such as voluntary associations, government entities, non-profit organizations, and businesses. It was a frequent occurrence that discussion regarding one asset would lead to open questions about its connection to other facets of the community, subsequently revealing even more resources. Through this process, many assets were recorded that were not discovered through the document study. Discussing the inventory with residents

Kyle Pitzer is ... at The University of Texas at Austin

also led to the detection of activities that were being conducted at different locations within the community that may not be readily apparent to those who do not participate. The formatting possibilities for the asset inventory and the kinds of information stakeholders wanted to be available was also briefly discussed.

Through both methods of information collection, numerous resources were identified and recorded. The identification and addition of assets will be ongoing, but the initial information collected was enough to begin developing the inventory and disseminating it to stakeholders. The following section describes the initial process of reviewing and organizing the assets and putting them into a format that could be easily disseminated.

The Asset Inventory

The assets identified through the information collection process were initially documented using Microsoft Excel and included basic information such as address, phone number, type of asset, and priority. Many of the assets had contact information, aside from those identified as natural or infrastructural assets, such as parks, a creek, and transportation networks. The types of assets delineated were citizens' associations, government organizations, non-profit organizations, and private organizations, based on Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) model for asset-based community development. Through initial interviews with stakeholders, it was decided that individual skills and talents would not be included, but may be added later. It was also determined that rather than combining all of the institutions into one category, they would be divided based on their status as public, private, or non-profit. Additionally, eight priority areas emerged through both the document study and the interviews. The priority areas included public safety, civic life, education, health, environment, economy, social service, and transportation. Many of these were explicitly mentioned in the neighborhood plans and others were added based on feedback from stakeholders.

The first step performed in developing an

expanded version of the asset inventory was to create an example of the final product in order to ensure that it made sense to the stakeholders that would be using it. The asset inventory example contained 10 assets spanning type and priority area. Each asset was placed in the appropriate category based on type and contained contact and program or service information where applicable. This document was brought to a community meeting and presented to the Rundberg Revitalization team, which is a team made up of stakeholders in the community that are behind much of the revitalization efforts currently taking place. Community residents who are not part of the revitalization team are also welcome at these meetings. Those who were in attendance were able to review the example as well. In addition to reviewing the example at the meeting, a sign-up sheet for receiving an electronic copy of the example and the spreadsheet containing all of the identified assets was passed around the meeting. Finally these documents were posted to "Basecamp", an online internet-based project management tool. Most of the active stakeholders from various organizations and neighborhoods within the area maintain a presence on Basecamp and were able to review the documents and provide feedback regarding the format and content.

With the feedback provided by community members, the final product was developed. The asset inventory contained 136 assets across the 4 tiers of agency and 8 priority areas mentioned above. Furthermore, each tier contained subcategories such as "Faith Groups" and "Neighborhood Associations" for citizens' associations, "Schools" and "Community Centers" for government organizations, and "Healthcare" and "Businesses" for private organizations. An excerpt of the asset inventory can be reviewed in Figure 1. Over the course of developing the inventory, 11 community members were directly involved through the provision of information regarding community assets or feedback about the format and types of information that would be disseminated through the inventory. These contributors included

residents of all five of the area neighborhoods as well as staff members of non-profit organizations operating within the community. All of the contributors are active citizens and highly involved in the Restore Rundberg project as well.

Next Steps

The final product described above will be turned over to the Austin Police Department and the Community Engagement Specialist serving under the department to take forward. Although

Figure 1. Excerpt from the Restore Rundberg Asset Inventory.

Citizens' Associations

Neighborhood Associations

North Austin Civic Association (NACA)   info@naca-austin.org

President: John Green

Priority: Civic Life

Government

Community Centers

Little Walnut Creek Library   835 W Rundberg Ln   (512) 974-9860

Programs: Tutoring and homework assistance for grades 1-12; English conversation practice; computer skills classes

Priority: Civic Life, Education

Non-Profit Organizations

Multicultural Refugee Coalition   P.O. Box 41566   (512) 537-5654

Programs: English as a second language; computer literacy; career development and individualized career services such as resume and cover letter writing and applying to jobs online; community sewing program; community gardening program; the "Global Kids Club", which aims to improve English proficiency, success in school, knowledge of life in America, social skills, and pride in bicultural identity.

Priority: Civic Life, Education, Social Service

Private Organizations

Healthcare

Hill Country Counseling   1433 Fairfield Drive   (512) 491-8444

Services: Mental health services for adults, children, families, and seniors including partial hospitalization; outpatient; individual therapy; group/family therapy; parenting classes; 24 hour emergency line; and community education. These services address mild to moderate mood disorders; adjustment problems; grief/loss; behavioral problems; substance abuse/chemical dependency issues.

Priority: Health, Social Service

136 assets may seem like an abundance of resources, it is likely that there are many more that still exist and that will be developed as the project moves forward. By integrating this inventory into the work done by the Community Engagement Specialist, it will ensure that the inventory is maintained and kept current as the community revitalization efforts yield outcomes and more resources are identified or generated.

The natural next step from the development of the asset inventory is to utilize the inventory in the community revitalization initiatives. In order to test the inventory, it could be piloted in the design and implementation of small projects around the community that align with the identified priority areas. In doing this, those utilizing the inventory can identify gaps in the information that is available or add new information such as contact persons for specific assets to make the inventory more useful. In addition to developing the inventory further, those conducting these types of small projects will build skills and networks that will strengthen the revitalization efforts.

For example, the community could have an interest in preventing litter on one of the main thoroughfares in the community based on the "environment" priority area. To prevent littering, community members may hope to leverage resources found in the inventory to have public trashcans installed on the road. Within the inventory, there are many resources that could serve as means to this end. The inventory contains government departments that could provide the trashcans, non-profit organizations that could sponsor neighborhood beautification, and many community-based associations that might take up such community improvement projects. Through completing projects such as this, the value of the inventory can be gauged and it can be improved upon with additional necessary information.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, taking an asset-based approach to community revitalization has been suggested as more efficacious than a needs-based approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This served as the impetus for developing the asset inventory and based on the outcome, it is evident that there are many resources available to the Rundberg community that can be utilized in the revitalization efforts. The process and product was stakeholder driven, with community residents and staff members of community-based organizations determining the information that should be available through the asset inventory and exactly how it would be presented. There is also clear path forward in using the asset inventory to affect community change. By incorporating it into the implementation of the project, the inventory will remain a useful tool for the community and will continue to grow as the project moves forward and new assets are generated and secured.

References

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