



# Urban District Strategy: Community Asset Mapping

*This document is one of five in a collection of resources specific to Unified Champion Schools programming in urban school districts. The complete set of Urban District Strategy resources is located at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/community-building/youth-and-school/unified-champion-schools> and was published August 2019.*



Special Olympics  
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Every community has assets, and it is critical for individuals and organizations interested in working in a community to understand the community's strengths and resources, and how to use them to work effectively with and within that community. Respect and humility are key elements to building strong relationships of trust in a new partnership. Taking the time to get to know a neighborhood or district early in the development of such relationships sets a solid foundation toward a productive partnership. Before attempting to introduce a new program or service into a community, it is essential to have a structured process for gathering information and outlining procedures specific to strategic partnership development supporting program implementation.

### **What is Community Asset Mapping?**

Community asset mapping is a process used to evaluate and rank a community's capital and resources to determine how they can be applied to support growth and development, and improve quality of life within that community. When those resources are identified, an asset map is created and used to register how various resources intersect, and how they can be integrated to strengthen service delivery. In addition to learning the talents, characteristics and fine points of a community, the asset mapping process sends a clear message of commitment to understanding the strengths and unique aspects of a neighborhood before introducing an assortment of programs and services that may or may not be a good fit.

Community asset mapping is an effective undertaking for identifying resources, potential partners, and opportunities for implementing the Unified Champion Schools Urban School District Initiative. Not all urban school districts face the same challenges or have the same assets. Therefore, an initial investment of time in the mapping process is essential to increasing potential for optimum results.



## Planning Questions

- What can we achieve by using our own assets?
- What can't we do with our assets that must be done by outsiders?
- What can we achieve with our own assets if we get outside help?

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## How to Conduct Community Asset Mapping in the District

- Convene a planning team to develop a strategy for mapping community assets.
- Obtain community data:
  - » Number of elementary, middle and high schools in the district
  - » Size of the student population
  - » Existing programs serving general education students and students with intellectual disabilities
  - » Cultural diversity and ethnicity
- Identify assets required for the program.
- Identify potential obstacles or service gaps.
- Collect Information using multiple measures:
  - » Interviews
  - » Focus groups
  - » Community forums
- Mobilize the assets.

An asset map, directory, or other working document should result from the community mapping exercise and be used to empower the community, identify and develop meaningful partnerships, and assist in building and strengthening Unified Champion Schools programs in the district.

The map should include a directional scale of transportation and walkability from 1 – 5 miles to determine the feasibility of using the resource. Overall, it should be a dynamic tool that can be amended and modified as the program grows.

## Potential Obstacles or Service Gaps

- Transportation
- Child care
- Health services
- Meals

## Examples of Asset Categories

### Individual

- Talents
- Skills
- Experience
- Networks

### Community

- Volunteers
- Services
- Businesses
- CBO

### Institutional

- Elected officials
- School officials
- Faith-based organizations
- Higher education
- Media

### Physical/Land

- Parks and recreation facilities

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## Mapping Unified Champion Schools Components With Five Ps

Information obtained through community asset mapping can be categorized into five areas:

- People
- Physical space
- Public transportation
- Parent/family engagement
- Partnerships

Using these five areas, the asset map should be differentiated by Unified Champion Schools components.

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## Inclusive Sports

Inclusive sports needs are centered primarily around space, and people to support the athletes. However, it is important to consider family needs in urban areas when family members are working or have children in more than one school.

- People (e.g., coaches, referees, event volunteers)
- Physical space (parks and recreation facilities when school resources are limited)
- Public/private transportation
- Parent/family engagement (childcare support)
- Partnerships
  - » Community sports
  - » Community-based organizations
  - » Youth leagues
  - » Faith-based institutions
  - » Law enforcement
  - » Sports and athletic associations



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## Inclusive Youth Leadership

Mentorship is an area of interest in many urban areas, and exploring partnerships with the extensive number of civic and service organizations in these locales can lead to valuable resources for support of the Unified Champion Schools program. Application of the five Ps in this area should also incorporate media relations, which can bring visibility to the entire program, and assist in the overall goal of Unified Champion Schools expansion in the community.

- People (school, business and community leaders and elected officials)
- Physical space
- Public transportation
- Parent/family engagement
- Partnerships (including media)

### Community Partnership Examples

- Cultural centers
- Churches and faith-based organizations
- Youth-centered programs
- Boys and Girls Club
- YMCA/YWCA
- Better Business Bureau
- Chamber of commerce
- Networking organizations
- Libraries
- Private businesses
- Nonprofits
- Law enforcement
- Higher education
- Youth leadership training organizations

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## Whole School Engagement

School administrators and board members are a key component to whole school engagement, and can facilitate the use of space, and, where available, transportation resources. Programs such as Communities in Schools are already structured to use and extend resources beyond the traditional school day and program, and offer opportunities for partnerships with Unified Champion Schools. Again, use the five Ps to map and assess the needs and resources within the community.

- People (school administrators, school board members)
  - Physical space
  - Public transportation
  - Parent/family engagement
  - Partnerships (Communities in Schools)
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## Building Partnerships

One of the primary goals of asset mapping is to build and sustain partnerships for growth and sustainability of programs. Once perspective partners are identified, the following steps should be taken:

- **Survey potential partners**

The asset mapping exercise should guide the identification of potential partners in business, government, and community leadership positions. Once those individuals have been identified, a survey should be conducted to determine their interest in learning more about Unified Champion Schools and partnering with the program. If the asset map has identified a need and there is not an obvious potential partner, other possibilities will need to be considered. Social media can be used to gain insight and information into organizational interests and priorities.

- **Engage potential partners (including inviting them to participate in Unified Champion Schools events)**

Engaging local media, business leaders, and sports figures in Unified Champion Schools events is a way to draw interest and expose the community to the program, its goals, and its value to the community.

- **Schedule initial partner discussions**

Initial contact with a potential partner is often not with the lead person in an organization or business, but with a key staff person. Do not hesitate to build relationships at all levels of an organization on the way to establishing a long-term healthy relationship. Sharing information about the program, and associated goals and objectives increases support when decisions must be made on resource allocation.

- **Establish partnership agreements**

Partnership agreements do not need to be complex documents, but there should be a clear understanding of the responsibilities and expectations of the school or district and Special Olympics consistent with the relationship Special Olympics maintains with other schools and districts.

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## Evaluation and Measurement

Measuring progress toward an established Unified Champion Schools 10 percent urban district school participation goal will be critical to ensuring the goal is met. Programs will be expected to measure program effectiveness, impact and progress, and indicate how community assets are being used to promote Unified Champion Schools.

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## Technical Assistance

SONA considers community asset mapping critical to building an effective urban program, and will provide technical assistance to program staff in the development of mapping and evaluation tools. The evaluation instrument and technical assistance services will be aligned with evaluation and technical assistance components associated with other aspects of the Urban District Strategy resources.



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