

Sample Reentry Service Inventory and Asset Mapping Protocol

OVERVIEW

The goal of a reentry service inventory and asset mapping strategy is to assess the location of services available to former prisoners in selected neighborhoods in a city, and to document the vulnerabilities and assets in the areas that surround them. Such efforts aim to identify the strengths and assets of these neighborhoods, which are often discussed solely in terms of the economic and social disadvantages they face. Working in teams of two, staff persons can record and then map five categories of community assets: religious institutions; schools; government offices and community service agencies; businesses—goods/services; and businesses—restaurants/food establishments. In addition, we would suggest going one step further to identify the positive and negative factors in the areas surrounding services and goods available to former prisoners. For example, would a former prisoner have to pass by an open-air drug market to reach a health clinic?

In conjunction with the asset mapping, an organization may also want to conduct a series of skills surveys with residents in the target neighborhoods. These interviews can help to assess the human capital of these communities, as well as lending weight to the argument that programs for former prisoners should and could be staffed by residents of the communities in which they are located. The decision on whether to invest in an additional skills survey effort would depend on what the organization thinks it could do with this type of information.

PROCEDURE

Below we outline the procedure for conducting a services inventory and asset mapping effort.

1. Select Neighborhoods

Using the maps showing distributions of returning prisoners, identify which high-concentration areas would be the most interesting areas on which to focus your attention. The number of neighborhoods selected would, of course, depend on cost and staff restrictions. We recommend piloting the mapping procedures on a one- or two-square-block area to better estimate how much time this effort would require and to assess how large of an area could be covered within reasonable budgetary allowances.

2. Recruit Mappers

We suggest using one of your street workers in the recruitment process, since they know the returning prisoners in the area and have a good rapport with them. The ideal former prisoner for this kind of work would be from the community, familiar with the neighborhoods of interest, and have good interpersonal skills.

3. Train Mappers

The formality and extent of training will depend on the number of people recruited to serve as mappers. If only a few people will be involved in the effort, shadowing a staff member as they conduct the first few surveys on the street might be sufficient. If a larger group is involved, more formal training, including some role playing, might be more appropriate. Certain issues should be addressed in the training of any mappers used in this effort: the importance of legible handwriting, appropriate demeanor when interviewing people, attention to detail, documentation of labor hours, and dealing with sensitive issues. For instance, if a male mapper encounters a homeless shelter for women, he could simply make a note of its location and have a woman return to conduct the interview rather than potentially upsetting the residents by entering the facility.

4. Design Survey Instrument

It would be useful to consider the data collection methods used by organizations that have conducted this work in the past, so as not to reinvent the wheel when designing the survey instrument.

5. Conduct Survey

Once the data collection instrument has been designed, mappers can begin to canvas the selected neighborhood to catalog the assets. The pilot test should give you a better estimate of how much time would be required to entirely survey the areas of interest. One potential problem with this type of work is ensuring the validity of the survey results. A couple of different methods can be used to counteract this problem. If only a few mappers will be employed, it may work best if the surveys are conducted in teams of two—one organizational staff member and one former prisoner. If a large number of mappers will be used, a staff member could validate a random subset of places that were listed as assets.

6. Reimburse Participants

Since we do not yet know how much time this type of work would involve, it is also unclear how mappers should be paid. For instance, would it be more appropriate to pay by the hour or by the geographic area covered? Once again, a pilot should help you to think through these issues and determine the most suitable payment approach.

7. Create Products

Once all of the data have been collected, staff will geocode each address by type of service/asset. Maps can then be created to show where different kinds of services are located. Different landmarks can be added to the maps, such as bus routes and bus stops. Finalized maps can serve a number of functions. They can be given to former prisoners as a resource. They may also be used by the researchers and services providers to further assess the availability of services, determine gaps, and identify potential areas for action.