



FIE Policy Brief

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## **Neighborhood Asset Mapping: Moving Toward Convergence**

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The Jacksonville Next Generation Initiative supports local efforts to improve children's academic achievement through a strategic, collaborative focus on two areas: strengthening the links among schools, families, and neighborhoods and improving the quality and availability of outside-the-classroom learning experiences. The initiative supports the existing Duval County Public Schools Title I Neighborhood Learning Networks established in collaboration with the Florida Institute of Education at the University of North Florida. Working with school-based Title I Family Involvement Centers, the Jacksonville Next Generation Initiative aims to increase collaboration among the schools and organizations serving children and families at both the neighborhood and community levels.

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***Key points***

- Convergence is a strategic approach focused on building networks and collaborative partnerships.
- Neighborhood asset mapping is a strategy used successfully to build strong home, school, and community connections.
- The neighborhood asset mapping process documents a neighborhood's assets offered by individuals, organizations, and institutions.
- The outcomes of neighborhood asset mapping support convergence among community stakeholders.

***Introduction***

Poverty is a significant factor that affects student achievement (Pellino, 2006). In order to close the achievement gap between children from low socioeconomic homes and their more affluent peers, community stakeholders must work collaboratively to provide all children with rich learning opportunities, inside and outside the classroom (Epstein, 1995). To address this need, the Jacksonville Next Generation Initiative (JNGI), is adapting a general model for convergence to an educational setting by documenting the process of building networks and collaborative partnerships in low-income neighborhoods served by Title I schools (McGrath, 2008).

Efforts include child-focused and school-based collaboration at the neighborhood level. Neighborhood Learning Networks (NLNs) developed from collaborative efforts of the Florida Institute of Education (FIE) and Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) serve as the focus for the documentation process. The Title I Family Involvement Centers (FICs) serve as the anchor sites for each of the neighborhood level networks. The JNGI will also document the process of building a “network of networks” among neighborhood and the community-wide public and private organizations that are currently working to improve the learning and social development outcomes for children in the NLNs.

One of the five NLNs is using the process of community asset mapping as a strategy to support convergence among schools, neighborhoods, and families. The asset mapping project is being piloted in Jacksonville's Arlington NLN. Following a review of the pilot implementation, the refined strategy will then be replicated in other local DCPS NLNs (College Gardens, Eastside, Ribault, and Springfield).

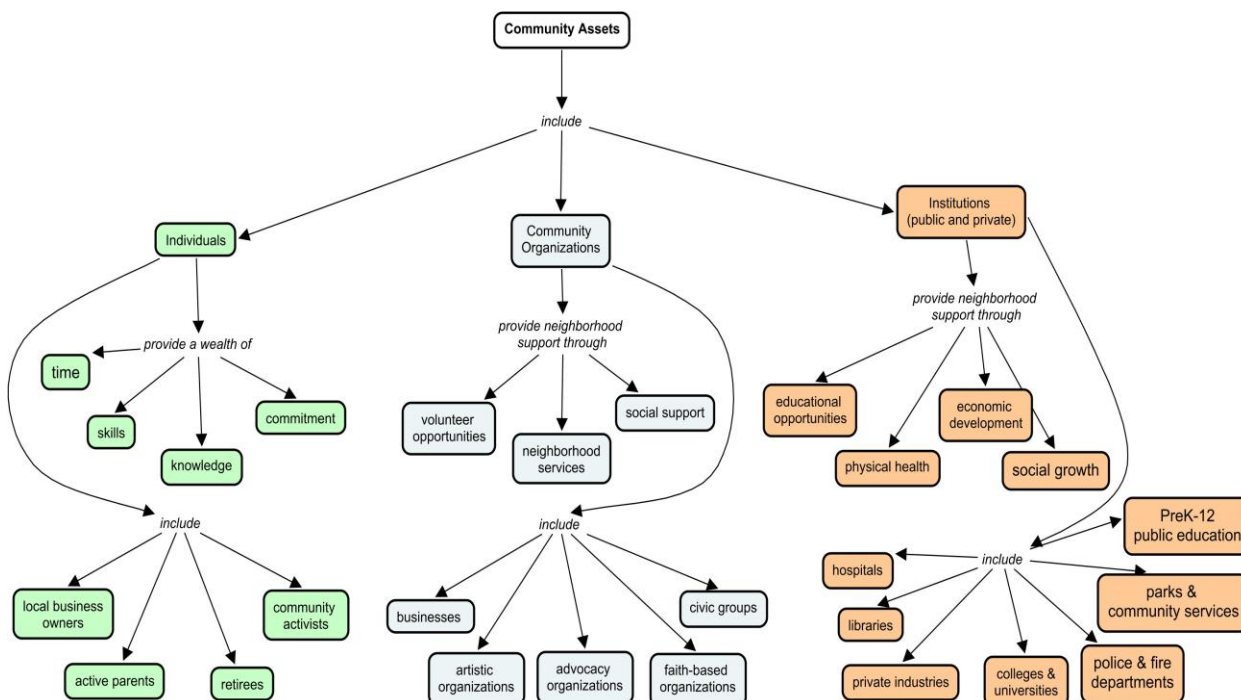
**One NLN is using the process of community asset mapping as a strategy.**

The purpose of this brief is to provide partners and others with an overview and rationale of how the asset mapping strategy can support a model of convergence focused on improving children's learning. This brief first examines research and existing asset mapping approaches to better understand the process and identify attributes of successful programs. Next, potential challenges are identified. The JNGI model is then described. The brief will conclude with questions for consideration.

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## What is Asset Mapping?

Asset mapping is a community development model most often used for revitalizing communities by identifying and building on a community's strengths (assets) rather than its challenges (deficits). This strategy begins by analyzing strengths currently present in a community, including “the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area – not with what is absent or problematic” (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).



**Figure 1: Concept map identifying examples of community assets**

The concept map shown in Figure 1 outlines the types of assets in a community organized by three categories: individuals, organizations, and institutions. The process is strength-based, internally focused, and driven toward building supportive relationships among local residents, local organizations, and local institutions as a means of developing and enhancing neighborhood capacities.

When thinking of strengthening neighborhoods, particularly those experiencing economic challenges, people often focus on deficits or needs that exist in their community. A needs-based approach focuses on factors missing in the community and relies primarily on external support (Pinkett, 2000; Turner & Pinkett, 2000). Deficits and weaknesses are identified within a community and typically reflected in a map targeting needs such as neighborhood illiteracy, teen pregnancy, and criminal activities.

A needs-based approach hinders community members from taking control of their future (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Not only does this approach direct funding to service providers such as public, private, and nonprofit human service organizations instead of community residents, but it also identifies and targets residents as consumers of services (Beaulieu, 2002). When residents think of themselves and their neighborhoods as “deficient” and “incapable,” they lose the incentive to take charge of their lives. Most importantly, the needs-based model does not encourage relationships to be formed from within. Residents seek the help of experts as opposed to developing links of support internally, within their neighborhoods.

In contrast, an asset-based approach begins with internal strengths, capacities, and skills available within the neighborhood. By concentrating on strengths, the asset mapping approach encourages local community members to support the community using collaborative practices among schools, community organizations, and institutions. The asset-based approach begins by identifying assets from individuals, organizations, and institutions, then mapping and mobilizing these assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). In order to capture the richness of a neighborhood, it is vital to collect detailed information about the three types of community assets. Through this process, local residents and groups develop a sense of purposefulness in reshaping the culture of the neighborhoods in which they live.

**Through the asset mapping process, local residents and groups develop a sense of purposefulness in reshaping the culture of the neighborhoods in which they live.**

### *Asset Mapping Process*

The asset mapping process begins by first pinpointing or mapping neighborhood assets that already exist within the community. Identifying assets among individuals is an important step in the asset mapping process. The skills, knowledge, and talents offered by the individuals residing or working in the neighborhood should be inventoried. For example, a capacity inventory, demographic information about people, places, and services available in the neighborhood, is often used to identify local individuals who are willing to volunteer their time, skills, knowledge, and commitment. These individuals may include local business owners, active parents, community activists, and retirees. Local individuals identified through the capacity inventory process are critical to building relationships among assets and are considered to be the heart and soul of community building (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1996, p. 7).

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In addition to identifying the talents and skills of the individuals, community organizations must also be inventoried. These organizations might include neighborhood service clubs, women’s organizations, athletic groups, and fraternal organizations. Local business associations are invaluable and should be included but are not often found in older, low-income neighborhoods.

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The third focal point for building neighborhood capacity is inventorying institutions. Institutions include businesses, government, and agencies such as schools, libraries, and fire stations. Large-scale community organizations such as United Way are likely to be considered institutional assets. Similar to government agencies, United Way programs support both individual neighborhood residents as well as the city at large. In developing community asset maps, three important questions must be answered (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1996).

- 1) Who are the individuals, organizations, and institutions that can act effectively as the asset development champions in the neighborhoods?
- 2) What types of neighborhood-wide research, planning, and decision-making processes can be used to strengthen children's learning in the neighborhoods?
- 3) What connections can be made to resources located outside the neighborhoods to strengthen the learning of children outside the classroom?

The process should include as many residents of the neighborhood as possible in both the discussions and decision making. The goal is to develop community-building strategies that account for the interests and strengths of residents by building the power to define and control the future of the neighborhood from within (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1996). By developing inventories of individuals, organizations, and institutions at each level, relationships are developed among assets. Connecting and mobilizing all of the neighborhood's assets help develop and strengthen the NLN's capacity to shape and exchange information internally to improve children's learning. The goal of these internal partnerships among the identified and mobilized individual, organizational, and institutional assets is sustainability; this occurs when the combined resources are multiplied in power and effectively work together over time (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

### ***Why Use Community Asset Mapping?***

One major challenge today's educators face is how to improve the learning and social development of children from disadvantaged neighborhoods. Low-income neighborhoods often have barriers that impede collaboration. The need for collaboration and partnership among the school, home, and community and the benefits for student achievement are supported by several research studies (Epstein, 1995; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McGrath, 2008; Pellino, 2006; Weiss, Coffman, Post, Bouffard, & Little, 2005). A collaborative home-school partnership helps to "engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own success" (Epstein, 1995, p. 83). Shared responsibility for children's learning among the school, home, and community enhances the children's overall learning experience and level of engagement.

It is clearly evident that the task of improving collaboration in low-income neighborhoods cannot be accomplished without intentional and explicit support from all stakeholders. Improving educational outcomes for students living in disadvantaged neighborhoods requires collaboration at every level of society, particularly families, schools, and communities (Bofford, Goss, & Weiss 2008). Research indicates that by

focusing on the assets found within a neighborhood, local efforts can be supported to improve children's academic achievement by strengthening the collaboration among schools, families, and communities in order to improve the quality and availability of outside the classroom learning experiences (Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes, & Malone, 2009). Neighborhood asset mapping provides a platform for beginning the collaborative process.

### ***Stories of Success: Two Case Studies about Community Development***

The following two case studies demonstrate different examples of convergence. The first, the Stark Education Partnership, is an example of a non-profit education reform effort within Stark County, Ohio. The partnership was maintained by the collaboration among educators, business, community, and civic leaders with a specific focus on education. The second case study, School and Community Connections – Calumet High School and the Auburn Gresham Community, Chicago, Illinois, demonstrates a successful school-community design, taking into account assets at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels and connecting them to a neighborhood school. Examining the strategies and practices used in these initiatives informs the JNGI as a model of convergence as the NLN is developed.

***A Model of Convergence in Ohio: The Stark Education Partnership, Inc.*** The Stark Education Partnership, a nonprofit organization in northeast Ohio, was founded in 1989 through collaboration among four Stark County agencies (McGrath, 2008). This area was identified as a region with common challenges and opportunities. The partnerships among the organizations served as a mechanism to support educational reform through school-based initiatives to better serve children in the community. The strategic alignment of connections and collaboration among the various sectors of the community was a key factor in the success of this initiative. By linking improved education outcomes with the quality of life in the community, the Stark Education Partnership formed a network of assets, including businesses, schools, colleges, universities, and community organizations, that promoted information sharing and regular communication. In addition to meeting regularly to analyze data, partners met to discuss the student performance and economic outcomes and shared ideas for developmental priorities. This iterative process led partners to a better understanding of the educational and economic barriers in the community.

***School and Community Connections – Calumet High School and the Auburn Gresham Community, Chicago, Illinois.*** Chicago public schools have historically faced multiple challenges, including being labeled in 1988 by William Bennett as “the worst schools in the nation.” Many schools were at risk of being closed. In 2006, Calumet High School, located in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood, was shut down by the local school district and reopened as a charter school, Perspectives Calumet High School (Chrzanowski, Rans, & Thompson, n.d). The 2007 reopening of the school worried community residents as they feared a charter school would not adequately meet the unique needs of their community. However, a stable school with strong community partnership was deemed critical to the success of the new school.



Prior to reopening the school, the Perspectives staff sought the support of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD) at Northwestern University to gain a better understanding of the community needs and concerns. The ABCD recommended hiring a full-time *community connector*- an individual responsible for building connections between the school and the community (Chrzanowski et al., n.d., p. 8). The community connector was hired and began by identifying five critical areas necessary for effective school-community collaboration and communication. The five areas included (a) asset mapping of the resources in Auburn Gresham, (b) building positive relationships and determining approaches that could support collaboration between the school and community, (c) discovering ways to bridge school and different community features, (d) increasing opportunities for students, teachers, and families to get involved with community organizations, and (e) recruiting students for the redesigned charter school. Building on the ABCD research model, a community listening campaign was executed and a community asset map was developed (Chrzanowski et al., n.d). The community asset map incorporated information gathered from business owners, community organizations, and local residents. The community asset map was guided by the shared vision of providing quality education to local students. The community connector utilized the asset map as a tool to initiate contact with individuals, groups, and businesses in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood (Chrzanowski et al., n.d).

The outcome of the asset mapping process in the Auburn Gresham community was regarded positively by neighborhood residents and Chicago Public Schools. From 2006 to 2009, networks of support were created for the Chicago neighborhood. Furthermore, the relationships that were formed helped foster the academic success of students at Perspectives Calumet High School. As of the date of the publication, the school had been making continuous progress on state assessments. In 2010, Perspectives Calumet opened a technology academy to provide an alternative graduation path for students within Chicago's Auburn Gresham neighborhood.

The case studies highlight four critical features for developing convergence. First, community organizations, institutions, and local residents must work collaboratively to develop a shared mission and vision for their work. Second, the role of community connector (person or group working at the neighborhood level to listen, gather data, and facilitate action) is necessary for success. Third, the strategy of creating a neighborhood asset map is a viable tool for beginning collaborative partnerships. Finally, a completed asset map provides a platform for future collaborative activities to support children's learning.

### ***Anticipated Challenges***

***Stakeholder Roundup – Engaging All Assets.*** Research has shown that community asset mapping is most successful when representatives from all three levels of community assets (individual, organizations, institutions) are engaged in the process (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1996). The process involves creative and opportunistic thinking to not only identify assets, but also to build ongoing and meaningful neighborhood learning networks within the community. To generate success, ongoing tracking systems of the current assets need be developed. Periodically, strategies need to be identified to replace the assets no longer available in the community.



***Changing Mindsets of Stakeholders and Neighborhood Residents.*** To be successful, mindsets of stakeholders and neighborhood residents must change from a needs-based perspective to an asset-based approach. Focus on assets might be the most important component in the process. The asset-based model supports relationships being formed within the community. Residents seek the help of experts to develop links of support internally. Those who reside within the neighborhood are able to better identify the local assets and construct a map identifying those assets that are most helpful (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). If community members do not acknowledge the importance of an asset-based approach, engaging them in the overall and ongoing process will be difficult. Strategies must be developed and implemented to garner community support and understanding. Once the needs-based mindset is replaced, the partnership-building process can begin by encouraging relationships and identifying sources of income, opportunities, and possibilities for growth within the neighborhoods in support of children's learning.

***Sustainability.*** Sustainability is the capacity to continue an active collaborative network among individuals, organizations, and institutions with a focus on improving children's learning internally (not relying on external facilitators). Assets can be fluid. Individuals, organizations, and institutions leave neighborhoods. Institutions and organizations traditionally work in silos and may revert back to traditional communication so that sustaining the network once established requires purposeful efforts among all partners and continuing commitment to the collaboration process.

**Sustaining the established network requires purposeful efforts among all partners and commitment to the collaboration process.**

### ***The JNGI Model***

The JNGI neighborhood asset mapping pilot project is a strategy for developing convergence at a local NLN. The JNGI convergence model is designed to promote children's development, school readiness, and success in school by enhancing the support provided to families, schools, and neighborhoods through networking and partnerships. Individual, organizational, and institutional assets that provide resources, information, and services to residents must be inventoried to help children succeed. Educational partners must work toward convergence by creating a learning network to leverage resources, eliminate silos, and develop effective, efficient, and sustainable systems that support the development of children's learning. Collaborative efforts resulted in the identification of low-income neighborhoods in proximity of Title I FICs. The JNGI began by building consensus around the appropriateness of asset mapping as a strategy. An FIE design team examined research to identify successful practices that support convergence. Upon an extensive review, the FIE design team began piloting the asset mapping process in the Arlington neighborhood, thus beginning the documentation process.

Using an asset-based approach, the FIE design team inventoried individual, organizational, and institutional capacities in the Arlington neighborhood. A community roundtable focus group was convened to help the design team gather further information

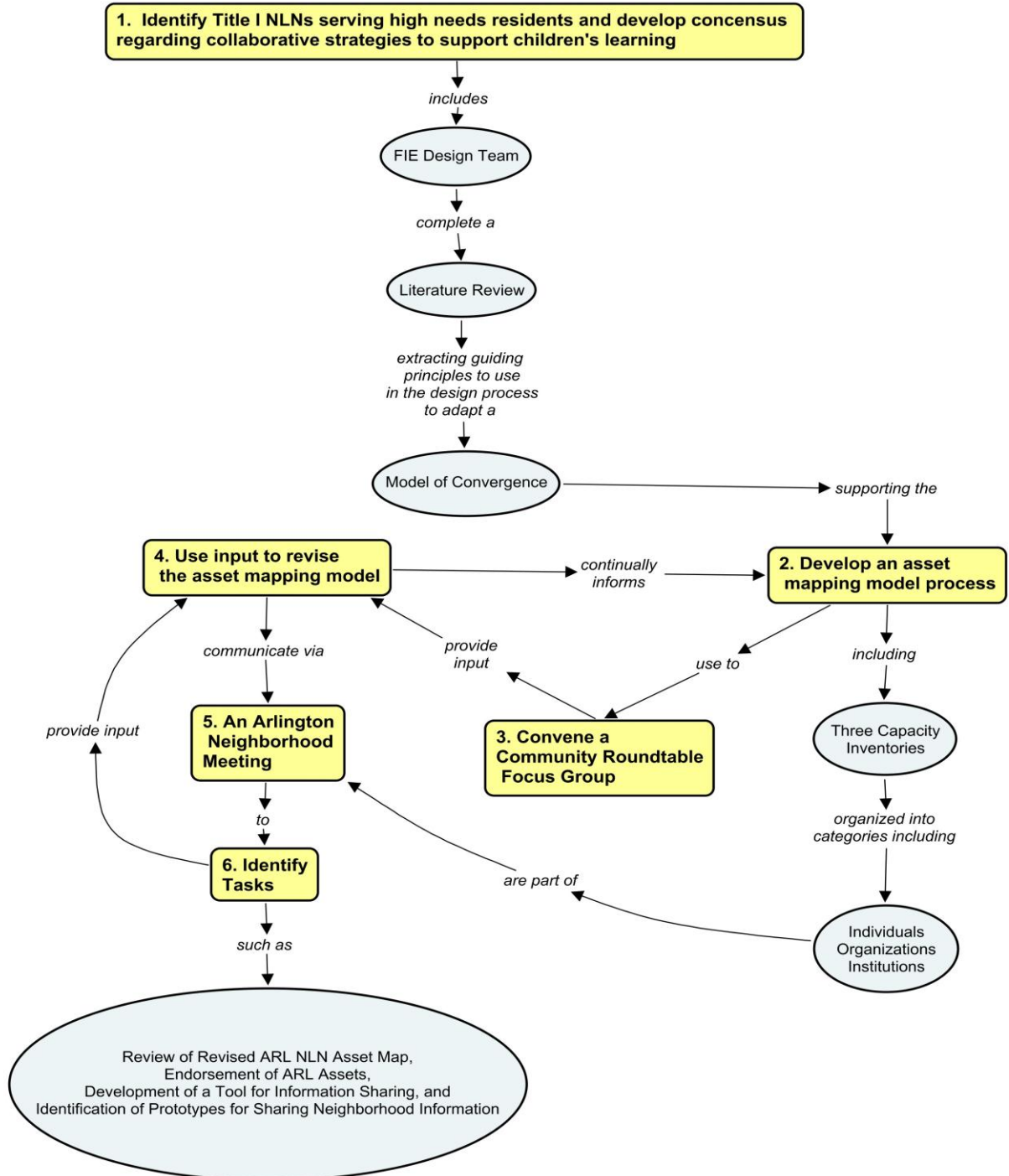
about the organizations and institutions in Jacksonville. The meeting served as a vehicle for identifying and discussing available assets in the Arlington NLN as well as the city-at-large.

The FIE design team gathered input from the community focus group and revised the asset inventory, creating an asset map. A neighborhood roundtable was held at the Arlington NLN school FIC site to review identified assets within local neighborhoods focused on the learning needs, social and emotional development, creative and performing arts, and physical needs of children. Roundtable participants included Arlington residents, teachers, parents, community stakeholders, and school-based administrators. The group represented individuals, organizations, and institutions in the neighborhood. The neighborhood roundtable team helped identify the assets they considered as most helpful, useful, and accessible. The neighborhood meeting also provided a forum for building relationships among residents and stakeholders.

**A neighborhood roundtable was held to review identified local neighborhood assets focused on the learning needs of children including learning needs, social and emotional development, creative arts, and physical needs.**

The information collected from the neighborhood participants is being used to revise the Arlington neighborhood asset map. As the community connector, FIE is developing a prototype for sharing information in the Arlington neighborhood. As the model is refined, FIE will move away from the role of the community connector, as DCPS staff sustain the partnerships at the neighborhood level. Simultaneously, the development and implementation of the asset mapping pilot project is being documented. Challenges and successes are being noted to inform the replication process in the other NLNs. The JNGI neighborhood asset mapping pilot process is outlined in Figure 2.

**What is the design process for the JNGI asset mapping pilot project?**



**Figure 2: Concept map of the JNGI asset mapping pilot process**

## ***Conclusion***

Neighborhood asset mapping is a successful strategy for increasing convergence in support of children's readiness for school success. Asset mapping is the process of creating a detailed inventory of valuable resources within the neighborhood and is used to identify programs and services available to local residents and encourage collaborative partnership with school-based family involvement centers to support children's school success. The process begins by identifying the strengths and resources found within the neighborhood. Once the neighborhood assets are identified, relationships can be nurtured by connecting and mobilizing the resources to address the children's and families' needs. Neighborhood asset mapping promotes neighborhood involvement and empowerment. This strategy supports strong home, school, and neighborhood partnerships. The pilot project for the Arlington NLN requires the collaboration of many partners. Reviewing related research and examining existing programs, the JNGI will use the asset mapping process as a strategy to support convergence among the schools, communities, and families at the neighborhood level.

## **Questions for Consideration**

1. How will assets be identified in each category within the neighborhood?
2. How will assets be identified outside the neighborhood?
3. How can input gathered at the neighborhood level help inform the JNGI asset mapping model?
4. What challenges might be anticipated during the neighborhood asset mapping process?
5. What efforts will be made to overcome these challenges?
6. What efforts are needed to continue dialogue with Arlington neighborhood residents during the asset mapping process?
7. What factors should be considered in capturing the assets within the community at large?
8. What types of community-wide activities will be used in building partnerships with city organizations and institutions that support children's learning?

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