# Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

*The future of every community lies in capturing the passion, imagination, and resources of its people.*
**-Ernesto Sirolli**

## Origins of ABCD

ABCD is a place-based framework pioneered by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann, founders of the ABCD Institute at Northwestern University. ABCD builds on the gifts (skills, experiences, knowledge, and passions) of local community members, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions to build more sustainable communities for the future (McKnight, 2017).

## ABCD Overview

The asset approach is a set of values and principles and a way of thinking about the world. It values the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in a community. It sees communities as co-producers of health and well-being, rather than the recipients of services.

The approach of ABCD is to enhance and support the capacity of a community to make visible their assets and to support and enhance the connection of those assets. These two essential roles according to McKnight (2017) are the way to undergird productive citizenship.

ABCD emerged as a critique of deficit-based approaches. The deficit approach focuses on the problems, needs and deficiencies in a community. It designs services to fill the gaps and fix the problems. As a result, a community can feel disempowered and dependent; people can become passive recipients of expensive services rather than active agents in their own and their families' lives. Here's a quick look at the difference between needs-based and asset-based approaches:

| NEEDS<br>(what is not there) | ASSETS<br>(what is there) |
|---|---|
| Services to meet needs | Connections and contributions |
| Consumers/Consumers/Clients | Co-owners/<br>Co-producers/Citizens |
| Programs are the answer | Local people are the answer |

Community residents must be valued as co-producers and citizens, rather than being viewed as clients, consumers and customers. They act responsibly when they care about and support what they create. The central factor in sustainable change is local leadership and its continuous development and renewal. The starting point for change is always mindset and a positive attitude. This power gives community a sense of agency to engage and participate in their own process.

ABCD begins with the idea that in every community, something works. Instead of asking "what's wrong, and how to fix it," the question we should be asking is "what's worked and how do we get more of it?" This generates energy and creativity. ABCD is not a recipe, but a place-based framework that incorporates such principles as:

- Meaningful and lasting community change always originates from within.
- The wisdom of the community always exceeds the knowledge of the community.
- Building and nourishing relationships is the fundamental action in community building.
- Communities have never been built by dwelling on their deficiencies, needs and problems.
- Communities respond creatively when the focus is on resources, capacities, strengths, aspirations and opportunities.

The critical developmental process of ABCD involves highlighting, mapping, connecting and celebrating the diverse range of community assets. Harnessing these connected assets for action creates and strengthens inclusive communities. The strength of the community is directly proportional to the level that the diversity of its community members' desire, and are able to contribute their abilities and assets to the well-being of their community. Every single person has capacities, abilities, gifts and ideas, and living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, gifts given and ideas shared.

## Practice of ABCD

According to the ABCD Institute (www.abcdinstitute.org), here are the key stages of ABCD in practice:
1. Mapping or making an inventory of the capacities and assets in a community/organization.
2. Building relationships and connections between community members and between community members and agencies, to change values and attitudes.
3. Mobilizing community members to become self-organizing and active by sharing knowledge and resources and identifying common interests.
4. Convening a core group of community members to identify, from the asset mapping and mobilizing activities, the key theme or issue that will inspire people to get organized, create a vision and a plan. The vision that community members share needs to bring people together and use their skills; reinforce their strengths and self-confidence.
5. Leveraging outside resources only to things that community members cannot do for themselves. Community members need to be in a position of strength in dealing with outside agencies.

*Source: (Foot & Hopkins, 2009).*

## Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

AI is a process of valuing and drawing out strengths and successes in the history of a group, a community or an organization. AI is used to develop a realistic and realizable vision for the future and a commitment to take sustainable action. AI creates a positive mindset by talking about success rather than being defined by past failures. The inquiry starts with appreciating the best of what is, thinking about what might be and should be, and ends with a shared commitment to a vision and how to achieve it. It is based on a basic principle: look for successes—look for what works well and do more of it.

*Source: (Foot & Hopkins, 2009).*

## Reading List

1. Baker, D. (2014). Developing and implementing a robust asset-based approach to public health. *Perspectives in Public Health, 134*(3), 129-130.
2. Brooks, F., & Kendall, S. (2013). Making sense of assets: what can an assets-based approach offer public health? *Critical Public Health, 23*(2), 127-130. doi: 10.1080/09581596.2013.783687
3. Foot, J. & Hopkins, T. (2009). A glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being. Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Available https://www.local.gov.uk/asset-approach-community-wellbeing-glass-half-full
4. Hammond, S.A. (2013). *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. OR: Hammond Thin Book Publishing Co.
5. Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets.* Evanston, Ill.: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University. Introduction available from https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/GreenBookIntro%202018.pdf
6. Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (2003). *Introduction to Asset Mapping*. Available from https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Documents/IntroAssetMapping.pdf
7. Kretzmann, J. P., & Rans, S. (2005). The Engaged Library: Chicago Stories of Community Building. Evanston, IL: Urban Libraries Council. Available from https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/ULCReport.pdf
8. Mathie, A & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-Based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice, 13*(5), 474-486. Available https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4029934.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A28686041ed728f76ed3f91d958f5f240
9. Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). *Who is driving development? Reflections on the transformative potential of Asset-Based Community Development*. Antigonish, Nova Scotia: Coady International Institute. Available from https://coady.stfx.ca/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/resources/publications/5_Who_is_Driving_Development.pdf
10. McKnight, J. (2017). *Asset-Based Community Development: The Essentials*, ABCD Institute. Available: https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/ABCD-%20The%20Essentials%20-2.pdf

## Video List

1. Angela Blanchard: You can't build on broken https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaX5DUGC1CU&t=173s
2. Cormac Russell: Sustainable community development: from what's wrong to what's strong https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5xR4QB1ADw&feature=youtu.be
3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg
4. By their own hands: https://coady.stfx.ca/by-their-own-hands/

## Other Resources

1. Asset-Based Community Development Institute, http://www.abcdinstitute.org/
2. A reading list on Asset Based Community Development (over 100 resources): https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2016/04/11/abcd-reading-list/
3. Bank of Ideas: https://bankofideas.com.au/
4. AI Commons: https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/
5. The Coady International Institute: https://coady.stfx.ca/abcd-case-studies-of-successful-asset-based-and-citizen-led-development/ (Case Studies)
6. Foot, J., & Hopkins, T. (2010). *A glass half-full: How an asset approach can improve community health and well-being*. London: IDeA. Available from http://www.assetbasedconsulting.net/uploads/publications/A%20glass%20half%20full.pdf