

Mapping Place-Based Educational Opportunities

Gather around a large sheet paper, the bigger the better, and distribute markers to everyone. Draw a shape roughly approximating the shape of your community in the center, with lots of room around the edges. Ask your group members, “What’s important to have on a map of our community? What places do we think other people would find interesting?” Invite them to sketch in and label anything that seems important. These things might include, for instance:

- Key public buildings like the post office or a museum
- Key private buildings like a popular store or well-known restaurant
- Geologic features like hills or valleys
- Watercourses like rivers, ponds or lakes
- Cultural landmarks like statues or historic markers
- Public land like municipal parks or surrounding national forest
- Bordering communities
- Natural features like a favorite tree or swimming hole
- Each group member’s favorite places

In this somewhat chaotic but creative atmosphere, ideas breed more ideas and you’ll find that your map is soon overflowing. Remember to notice the people who seem to know everything—you may need them later in the project.

Now, step back from your map. Using different colored markers, highlight:

- Locations of key learning opportunities
- Locations of possible service learning projects
- Locations of possible project partners

Following the exercise, post the map in a place where group members can continue to access the ideas generated, or add more and add to it.