

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

at a glance

WHAT IS ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

“Asset Based Community Development” or *ABCD* looks for, and starts from people’s gifts and strengths (*assets*). These assets equip people to create local opportunities and respond to needs and challenges in their neighbourhoods. ABCD goes beyond any individual’s gifts or particular group’s strengths to consider how these may come together to create broader changes for the common good within a community.



Where a *deficit-based* approach starts by identifying needs, *asset-based* community development identifies and builds upon community strengths. ABCD empowers individuals, associations to come together, with institutions in support when required, to develop their strengths, working together to build on the identified assets of all involved!

PRINCIPLES OF ABCD

- **Everyone has Gifts:** *Each person* in a community has something to contribute!
- **Relationships Build Community:** People must *be connected* for sustainable development.
- **Citizens at the Centre:** Citizens must be viewed *as actors*— not as passive recipients.
- **Leaders Involve Others:** Strength comes from *a broad base of community action*.
- **People Care:** *Listening to people’s interests* challenges myths of apathy.
- **Listen:** Decisions should come *from conversations* where people are truly heard.
- **Ask:** Generating ideas by *asking questions* is more sustainable than giving solutions.

WHY IS ABCD THE RIGHT CHOICE IN TODAY'S WORLD?

TO

Role: “Expert”



“Everything done, is **to** us and **without** us”

(Medical Model)

FOR

Role: “Expert”



“Everything done, is **for** us and **without** us”

(Charity Model)

WITH

Role: “Gapper”



“**Nothing for** us – or about us – **without** us.”

(Social Model)

BY

Role: “Animator”



“**By** us. **For** us.”

(ABCD)

FOUR ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF ABCD

The primary goal of an ABCD process is to enhance collective citizen visioning and production through a process that combines four essential elements:

1. Resources	2. Methods
<p>Six assets or resources enhance local wellbeing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contribution of Residents 2. Associations 3. Local Institutions 4. Local Places 5. Exchange 6. Stories 	<p>Communities use methods that identify and productively connect previously disconnected local resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover • Welcome • Portray • Share • Celebrate • Vision • Connect
3. Functions	4. Evaluation
<p>The seven functions are common features of social movements across history. These functions are <i>bottom-up</i> (grassroots), <i>disaggregated</i>, <i>hyper-local</i>, and <i>citizen-led</i>.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enabling Health 2. Assuring Security 3. Stewarding Ecology 4. Shaping Local Economies 5. Contributing to Local Food production 6. Raising our Children 7. Co-creating care 	<p>Consider how communities take stock of their journey together. Evaluate the extent to which they are engaged with the first three essential elements. This process is <i>not an audit</i>, it is to learn together and make any necessary adjustments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gift Exchange • Grouping • Inclusion

When these four elements are features of your community-building effort, it can be said to be an Asset Based Community Development process.

To dive deeper into these four elements, see: [The Four Essential Elements of an ABCD Process](#)

THE EIGHT TOUCHSTONES TO ABCD WORK:

These touchstones are a framework for working alongside communities, which are often complex and changing environments. The emphasis here is not on standardizing or generalizing, but on discovering good practices.

TOUCHSTONE 1: Establish a community-building team

Which people are good at discovering what people care about and where their assets can be used?

TOUCHSTONE 2: Recruit a Community Animator

This is not someone who will set an agenda, but someone who is skilled and passionate about helping people organize.

TOUCHSTONE 3: Host Community Conversations

Create opportunities for diverse conversations to take place, focused not on “deliverables” but on mutual discovery.

TOUCHSTONE 4: Engage Community Groups and Organizations

Clubs, associations, and informal groups offer great capacity towards community building.

TOUCHSTONE 5: Build Connections and Social Interaction

Connectors and Animators are to create meaningful interactions, not just plan events.

TOUCHSTONE 6: Inspire Vision and Plan for the Future

Once trusting relationships have begun to form, look to the future to imagine together what the community could look like (for example, ten years from now).

TOUCHSTONE 7: Implement Change

Take action and next steps to work towards your shared vision for the future.

TOUCHSTONE 8: Foster Celebration

Throughout the process, take joy in every positive development, in each person's gifts and the effort they invest. Believe-in and encourage each other!

Start by asking these three questions:

1. What can we do?
2. What do we need outside help with?
3. What do we need outside agencies to do for us?

The order of these three questions is critical. When we start with the third, we limit or preclude the power of citizens.

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To learn more about the touchstones, you can listen to the webinar [ABCD Lessons from Around the World](#)

HOW IS ABCD DIFFERENT FROM OTHER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT METHODS?

	Deficit Based	Asset Based
Purpose	Changing community through increased services	Changing community through citizen involvement
Method	Institutional Reform	Citizen-centered production
Accountability	Leaders are professionals and staff, accountable to institutional stakeholders	Leaders are widening circles of volunteer citizens who are accountable to the community
Role of Assets	Assets are system inputs. Asset mapping is data collection.	Assets are relationships to be discovered and connected. Asset-mapping is self-realization and leadership development.
Resources	Money is the key resource. Falls apart without money.	Relationships are the key resource. Falls apart when money becomes the focus.
Operating Challenge	How do we get citizens involved?	How do we channel and build on citizen participation?
System Dynamic	Tends to spread itself thinner over time.	Tends to gain momentum over time.
Evaluation	Success is service outcomes, measured mostly by institutional stakeholders.	Success is capacity, measured mostly by relationships.

Source: Dan Duncan, ABCD Institute Faculty

NOW WHAT?

If you feel that Asset Based Community Development might be the right approach for your work in your community, here are some resources on how to get started!

- [ABCD Canada website](#)
- [Four Essential Elements of ABCD Process](#)
- [A Basic Guide to ABCD Community Organization](#)
- [ABCD Institute website](#)
- [Nurture Development website](#)
- [ABCD Animation \(YouTube Video\)](#)

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