Asset mapping has long been a tool used by those working in community development as a way to identify and utilize the strengths of their communities. According to the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture, “community assets come in many forms, encompassing local institutions (i.e. schools, libraries, parks and businesses); local citizens’ associations (i.e. block clubs, churches and cultural groups); and the individual talents of all citizens regardless of age, disability, income level or occupation.” Asset-based community development focuses on leveraging these assets to revitalize cities and neighborhoods from the grass-roots level.

Arts and cultural assets are a specific subset of community assets that have great potential for supporting broader revitalization efforts and for engaging residents and visitors alike. A team of local stakeholders in Richmond realized this, so they set out to identify and promote the cultural assets that are most important to their community.

In 2014 Richmond was awarded an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for the purpose of cultural asset mapping. The goal was to use the grant to identify, map, and develop a wayfinding plan for a cultural trail in Wayne County. But due to the large variety of cultural sites and events throughout the county, it quickly became apparent that just one map and one trail would not be enough. Instead, the idea of multiple maps and multiple trails coming together in one “atlas” made more sense to the team in charge of the grant funds.

The team in charge of the project is made up of representatives from the following organizations: the Richmond Art Museum, Indiana University East, Earlham College, Wayne County Convention and Tourism Bureau and the City of Richmond. To facilitate community engagement, the committee recruited Big Car, a nonprofit based in Indianapolis that specializes in creative placemaking.

With Big Car’s help, the first stage of gaining community feedback was completed in spring 2016. To celebrate the work that had been accomplished, an ALL-IN grant from Indiana Humanities was used to throw a block party in downtown Richmond in May 2016. There, a few hundred community residents came out to learn more about the first 20 sites that had been chosen for the Wayne County Cultural Atlas. Residents also participated in activities led by local organizations that helped illustrate and celebrate the arts in Wayne County.

Eventually, the Cultural Atlas will include maps that guide residents and visitors alike to sites based on certain themes. But for now, the first map is made up of 20 sites that represent some of the local community’s favorite places. These sites were gathered through surveys that asked residents to identify their favorite places and to provide stories that illustrate what makes them great places.
The final sites that were chosen for the first map, based on resident input, are a great mix of community assets: Indiana University East, Glen Miller Park, the Depot District, Downtown Hagerstown, the Cope Environmental Center, etc.

For now, the cultural atlas exists only on paper. Ultimately, the goal is to have interactive markers placed at all 20 sites that will link to a website or an app that provides more information on current sites. There will also be opportunities through the markers and through the website/app for residents to give feedback on current sites and to suggest sites for future trails. The hope is that this will help residents and visitors discover new places while sharing what they love about the places they already know.

The Wayne County Cultural Atlas is a terrific example of asset mapping, thanks to the strong partnership between a large number of local organizations; to the high level of engagement among residents; and to the creative way local assets are being harnessed to promote Wayne County as a great place to live and visit. The focus on arts and culture was a creative way to build on broader revitalization efforts already taking place thanks to the Mayor’s Council on Economic Vitality, the Positive Place Initiative (PPI) and to Richmond’s designation as a Stellar Community in 2015. Together, these movements and their continued resident involvement will help develop economic opportunities and foster a greater sense of place throughout Wayne County.

For more info about the Wayne County Cultural Atlas, visit:
Wayne County Cultural Atlas
https://culturalatlas.org/

Big Car
http://www.bigcar.org/project/cultural-atlas/

For more info about the Our Town Grant and the ALL-IN Grant, visit:
NEA Our Town Grant
https://www.arts.gov/national/our-town

Indiana Humanities ALL-IN Grant for Block Parties
http://indianahumanities.org/our-programs/host-a-block-party

For more information about Cultural Asset Mapping, please visit:
D.I.Y. Creative Placemaking: An Introduction to Cultural Asset Mapping

Community Partnership for Arts and Culture: Guide to Mapping Neighborhood Arts and Cultural Assets