This workbook is designed as a guide to identify the cultural resources within your community. It is an empowering and capacity-building activity that will assist you and your neighbors to discover and share a sense of history as well as to identify the cultural assets within your community today. Together these elements form a core -- creating the character of your community. They are also key community elements to building a strong and positive future.

*Your Community Culture* will help you to describe your community. This process includes exercises in observation and community organizing designed to help you assess and develop the cultural and artistic potential of the resources within your community. The process begins with what you already know -- your own community, or region -- and encourages you to take a closer look in order to know your community better.

*Who used to live here*

*Who lives here now?*

*What is significant to your community?*

Discovering “community” is an active process. This guide can help you discover a new view of your community as a foundation for the future.
Your Community Culture:  
A COMMUNITY CULTURAL ASSESSMENT
...A STARTING PLACE

Julie A. Avery, Curator of History • Rural Life and Culture

Illustrations are from ROOTED IN PLACE Cultivating Community Culture
http://museum.msu.edu/ruralarts/rootedinplace/index.html

See MaineArts.com for new publication:
What is Community?
# Table of Contents

- Sensing Place .................................................. 4

- Local Culture Connects People with Place .......... 6

- Creating Your Cultural Inventory ....................... 7

- Discovery Research ........................................... 8
  1. Social & Economic Conditions ...................... 9
  2. Local History ........................................... 9
  3. Community questions ................................ 10

- Boundaries & Maps ........................................... 12
  Conceptual Boundaries .................................. 12
  Published Maps ........................................... 14
  Mental Maps ............................................... 14

- Create Your Community’s Profile ...................... 15
The Wildwood Barn – a rural mural researched, designed and produced by Menominee High School students and artist Renick Stevenson during 2001. Students worked with area educators, historians and community elders to document the traditional and historical influences of Menominee County which they presented visually for the community. Photo: Rick Gebhard, Eagle Herald, Marinette, WI, Menominee, MI.

Sensing Place

You live in your community neighborhood. Like all places where people grow up, visit, work, and live, this “place” influences who you are. Your relationship to your community is close, complex, and immediate. Becoming conscious of the things you sense about places, the sights, sounds, and smells of a local spot, the everyday comings and goings, helps us get our bearings.

Where does your community start and end?

Are there other names for this area? What stories are associated with those names?

Are there areas within your community that have names? What are their boundaries? What stories are associated with those names?

What associations do you have with the place where you live?
What are the physical boundaries?

What are some of the important physical characteristics of your locality?

What smells and sounds do you associate with this area?

What places in your area hold special significance? Why?

What sort of local ways and values are connected with this place?

Does your place have a name?

Is there a story associated with that name? What are some of the other names for the area?

What happened in the past in this area?

What is happening now?
Local culture connects people with place

Boat building traditions and culture in the Les Cheneaux Islands is celebrated by an annual boat show and festival of art. Photo: Annegret Goehring.

In viewing the cultural life of your community, we should look at the patterns and relationships that make individuals part of larger groups and events: teams, clubs, families, churches, volunteer organizations, and ethnic, religious, or occupational groups. It is through these relationships that we develop a sense of continuing membership in our communities.

We all harbor several identities which may include religious, political, and occupational affiliations as well as cultural and geographic backgrounds. Learning to recognize these multiple identities, not just to know ourselves but to work with others, is one of the benefits of cultural development work.

List all your identities as a community member.

To what circles of people are you connected?
Creating a Cultural Inventory

Local cultural expressions are wayfinders. Day-to-day--activities, whether it be cooking, tillng a garden, playing ball, or going to religious services--tie people to locale and are closely linked to a region's life and values. Where local culture is woven into a pattern of daily living, everyday activities may not be thought of as "cultural," in turn, practitioners may not think of themselves as artists or even experts. Although they may not know it, these people are the keepers of local culture. By virtue of their sharp memories or special talents, they have much to share.

The way people identify community members can indicate expertise. Creating a cultural inventory helps indicate key contacts, and identify the types of activities of interest to community members.

Inventories and descriptions of local practices help us see what people consider important in their communities. Consider these categories, and name the local experts.

- Athletics and games
- Baking
- Basketry
- Boatbuilding
- Brickwork
- Business history
- Canning and curing
- Car customizing
- Car repair
- Catering
- Church events
- Church suppers
- Community history
- Community leadership
- Community work
- Cooking
- Creative writing
- Crocheting
- Dance
- Dressmaking
- Embroidery
- Events history
- Family cooking
- Family histories
- Fishing
- Flower gardening
- Fly-tying
- Ghost stories
- Hair styling
- Herbal medicine
- Holiday meal preparation
- Home remedies/neighborhood medicines
- Homoeopathic medicine
- Humorous stories
- Hunting
- Instrument making
- Instrumental music
- Jewelry making
- Knitting
- Labor history
- Legends about places, people, and events
- Local bands
- Medical advice
- Midwifery
- Music history
- Nursing
- Occupational beliefs
- Painting
- Photography
- Playwriting
- Plumbing
- Poetry
- Political history
- Pottery
- Quilting
- Religious history
- Rug making
- School history
- Sermons
- Sign painting
- Spiritual readings
- Sports history
- Stories about local occupations
- Tailoring
- Tatting
- Testimonies
- Theater
- Vegetable gardening
- Vocal music
- Wall and fence making
- Weather lore
- Weaving
- Woodcarving
- Yard and garden decoration
- Yard decoration
- …other…
Discovery Research

Discovery research is one way of seeing the connections between people, place and local life. It is also a way of bringing local culture to light.

Discovery research is a process by which community members are identified and interviewed for information on local cultural expressions, including local events, history, performance, art, crafts, lore and work skills. The process is concerned not just with collecting information about cultural activities, but with finding connections within the community and organizing cultural events around those connections.

This row of barns on a Mansfield Township farmstead shows traditional Finnish building techniques -- early log and later frame construction. These are still in use today. Photo: Marice Bernhardt from Barns, Farms and Yams, published by the Iron County Museum.

Components of discovery research:

- Social and Economic
- Local history
- Community places and structures
Steps for effective discovery research

1. Social & Economic Conditions
Learn about the key social and economic conditions of your community. Research existing comprehensive plans and census reports at your town office or planning department and consider these questions:

   What is the age distribution of your community? Are there large cohorts of very young or elderly people?

   What is the educational profile of the community?

   What is the racial and ethnic composition of the community?

   What are the major occupations and economic activities of the community?

   How has the economic climate of the community changed over the past ten to twenty years?

   Which industries are growing, and which are not?

   What new industries are coming to the community, which are leaving, and why?

   What are key economic issues facing the community?

   What are some of the most important social issues in the community?

   What key social changes have occurred in the community over the past ten to twenty years?

   How have these changes affected local culture?

   What role can cultural resources play in addressing social problems and change in the community?

2. Local History
Read local history! If you have lived in your community for a long time, you probably know more than you think. Look for reports on local fieldwork at your local library, The Folklore Archive at Wayne State University; the University of Detroit Folklore Archive; the Detroit Public Library (Main Branch); the Michigan Traditional Arts Research Collections, Michigan State University Museum; and the State of Michigan Library.

Ask about local history!
How much of the history of your area do you know?

How do you see yourself fitting into that history?

Who knows the most about local history? What types of things do they know?

What is needed in your community to promote and preserve its cultural heritage?
Students learn about oral history and interview community seniors about their lives in Otsego County in a Gaylora Area Council for the Arts summer camp. Photo: Jan Kellogg.

3. Community Questions  *Ask questions about your community.*

What are some activities or organizations that are important in your community?

What cultural organizations exist?

Do you belong to any clubs or cultural organizations? Where do you meet?

What religious holidays are most significant for your group? How do you celebrate?

What do you do for special celebrations - dances, birthdays, weddings, christenings, funerals, graduations, family reunions?

Who are the artists living in your community?

Are there places where they can perform or display their work?
Are they involved with local schools? The local library? Senior centers?

What types of arts-in-education programs exist in your community?

Which schools offer artist-in-residence programs? Who coordinates them?

Are music, drama, dance, and visual arts classes offered in your schools? How often?

Do your schools offer advanced levels of study in an artistic discipline?

How are the parent-teacher organizations involved in the arts?

Vistas del Campo, a photo exhibit from the perspective of migrant Children, captured the first migrant student float ever to appear in the National Cherry Festival, Cherry Royal Parade in Traverse City. Photo courtesy Andrea Stupka.
Boundaries & Maps

Schoolcraft’s 1837 map of Michigan noted Indian reservations and population figures. Illustration courtesy Patrick LeBeau, from Indians of Michigan Yesterday and Today, A Teachers Guide.

Conceptual Boundaries
To discover a sense of place, first define and describe the geographic boundaries of your community. On your own or with a group, decide that the boundaries of your community are defined by the limits of: When thinking about the boundaries of a locale, remember that there may be many ways to describe a place, some of which may be geographically consistent, while others may overlap or conflict. All definitions are valid in that they reflect the many and varying ways that people experience place.

Do you define your place based on any of the following?
Can you describe them?
- Voting precincts
- State representative district
- State senator district
- Street locations
Is your place defined by administrative districts?
Can you name them?
Police precincts
School areas

Is it useful to define your place by statistical districts?
A group of census tracts
A Metropolitan Statistical Area, as defined by the Census Bureau
Zip code
Telephone number

Can Your community be defined by important man-made features? Name them.
- Streets
- Parks/playgrounds
- Schools
- Religious centers
- Community centers
- Businesses
- Libraries
- Recreation centers
- Post offices
- Monuments/statues
- Others

Try to define Your community by the market areas of local businesses or organizations - can you list by name the places with which you associate or used to associate?
- Appliance stores
- Barber shops
- Baseball clubs
- Beauty parlors
- Beer/wine stores
- Block clubs
- Bowling allies
- Boxing clubs
- Bump shops
- Car dealers
- Car washes
- Caterers
- Christmas tree vendors
- Clinics
- Curtain shops
- Dance halls
- Delivery services
- Dentist offices
- Doctors offices
- Drug, variety or dime stores
- Food vendors
- Football clubs
- Fraternal organizations
- Funeral homes
- Furniture stores
- Gangs/cliques
- Gas stations
- Gas stations
- Gun stores
- Hardware store
- Hat shops
- Hospitals
- Ice cream stores
- Jewelry stores
- Liquor stores
- Neighborhood associations
- Pawn shops
- Pool halls
- Radio/TV broadcast
- Record shops
- Restaurants
- Sewing goods
- Shoe stores
- Shows/movies
- Social clubs
- Tuxedo stores
- TV/radio repair shops
- ...other

Can Your community be defined by events? Name them.
- Weather (for example: big ice storms, dry spells, tornados)
- Riots/fights (for example: the 1967 riots)
- School (for example: rivalries, cap day, senior cut day)
- Church (for example: Tom Thumb weddings, plays, suppers, special days)
- Social clubs (for example: cotillion balls, players balls)
- Sports (for example: championships at Olympia)
- Devil’s Night (for example: trick or treating)
- Music (for example: Motown Revues)
- Reunions
Can Your community be defined culturally?

Are there specific names used to describe groups of people who originally settled or currently live in or use the area?

Can your community be defined by its major economic activities (past or present)?

If yes, please name and describe them.

Published Maps are also useful in defining a sense of place.

A local library, city or county planning office, historical society, chamber of commerce, and state and federal agencies can provide area maps on a variety of themes and scales. If available, these maps can help provide a more complete picture of Your community. Maps will also help in describing your place as well as discovering your community's resources.

Map check list:

- ___ US Geological Survey maps
- ___ county road maps
- ___ city street maps
- ___ zoning maps
- ___ deed maps
- ___ business maps
- ___ political maps
- ___ insurance maps
- ___ historic site maps
- ___ others

Mental Maps

Each of us carries an internal map on which we have inscribed the details of our daily lives. Make your own map showing your home, immediate neighborhood, and the places where you work, shop, worship, go to school, and play. Draw the routes you take to get from one place to another.
Your Community’s Profile

As information from your research unfolds, you will begin to see how complex and multifaceted your community is. A profile will emerge.

A community profile is a written document that can include the following information:

• An introduction, summarizing your discovery research

• A summary of community history, including recent demographics

• A description of the current economic and social conditions. A description and understanding of the local political environment

• A description of the place, including landscapes and neighborhoods

• An inventory of artists, local experts, cultural organizations, groups, events, and expressions

Writing a community profile can help you see your community's needs and resources more clearly. It can also become the basis for cultural programming grounded in local culture.

- **Educational programs** - Present local culture at your school.

- **Community celebrations** – Showcase local artists, historians, etc. at festivals, holiday events, and block parties.

- **Family programs** - Present a local artist or topic at your library, museum, church, senior center or community center.

- **Intergenerational programs** - Include seniors, children, and young adults at senior centers, hospitals, schools, or community centers in programs.

- **Workplace programs** – Present programs relating to occupational history and at work places. Present visiting artists during lunch breaks.

- **Outdoor public art** - Exhibit public art that makes local references in places such as public schools and buildings, empty lots, store windows, parking lots, grocery stores, police stations, or bus stops.

- **Performances and plays** - Sponsor stage presentations that call attention to local culture, local places, and their histories.