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Guide Brief 2 - Identify Social Institutions

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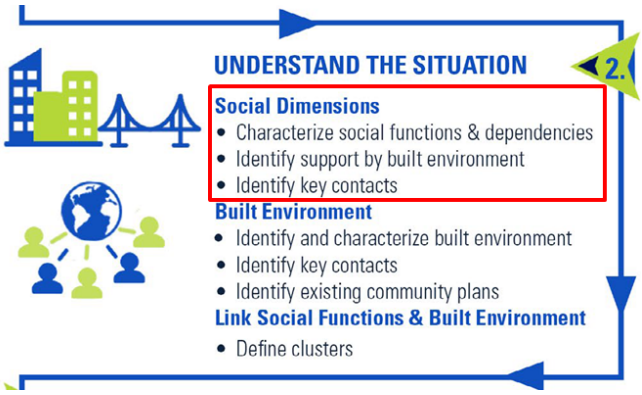
Guide Brief 2 – Identify Social Institutions

Applicable Section(s) of Guide:	**Volume 1, Section 3.1, Identify Social Institutions, p. 33**
	Volume 2, Section 10.1, Introduction, p. 10

Purpose and Scope

This Guide Brief provides additional rationale and guidance regarding Step 2 in the Guide—"Understand the Situation" —for how to "Identify Social Institutions." The primary intended audience is the social dimensions task group of the collaborative planning team. The data can be used in discussions with representatives of local organizations, as well as working with local experts on community databases and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).



Section 1 offers a short overview of why this activity is valuable to resilience planning and summarizes the types of social institutions and their key functions in a community. Sections 2 and 3 describe the basic activities associated with a community effort to identify its social institutions. They offer ideas on how a community might carry out this part of the process, with suggestions for types of expertise and where to find such expertise in local or regional departments, agencies, or organizations. Finally, Section 3 highlights ways in which dependencies among a community's population and the organizations within social institutions might be considered in the context of the built environment.

1. Why does a community need to identify its social institutions?

Part of Step 2 in the Guide is to develop an understanding of how a community's social institutions meet or contribute to basic individual, household, and overall needs. This is critical for resilience planning, because it involves recognizing the community's capacities (strengths), vulnerabilities, and dependencies among organizations associated with the following institutions: 1) family and kinship; 2) economy (i.e., business and commerce); 3) government; 4) health; 5) education; 6) community service organizations (CSOs); 7) religious, cultural, and other organizations that support belief systems; and 8) media. (See inset below, as well as Chapter 10 of the Guide.) For example, it is important to understand the roles that CSOs play in supporting the local population on a day-to-day basis to identify how the services they provide might be disrupted during and after a hazard event and to consider the potential for such disruptions to negatively affect the local population. It is also beneficial to recognize how communities access the capabilities their local CSOs provide during response and recovery. Perhaps more importantly, the social dimensions task group should explore how these organizations can become key players in resilience planning, as well as how their capacity can be developed to promote resilience by addressing underlying social vulnerabilities in the community. Similarly, communities should consider how damage

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to the built environment might affect its other institutions and organizations (e.g., the economy, government functions, and education).

Summary of Social Institutions and their Key Functions[1]

The ***family*** unit is typically defined as "a relationship between two or more people who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption." Increasingly, the definition of family has broadened to include extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins), or even long-time friends, friends of family, or other individuals who are not related by blood or marriage. The family and kinship institution facilitates learning about the world and the importance of love, care, and a sense of belonging. (See Section 10.4.1 of the Guide)

Economic institutions facilitate allocation of scarce resources across a society. Producers and suppliers combine factors of production (e.g., land, labor, capital) to create goods and services that meet the needs and desires of consumers. Availability of production factors, along with the demand of consumers, determines the final mix of goods and services produced, supplied, and consumed. (See Section 10.4.2 of the Guide.)

The ***government*** provides laws, regulations, and services to protect life and property, preserve peace and well-being, strengthen group identity and norms, and define social and economic goals for the future. Local governments, which are the focus of the Guide, are made up of general and specific purpose entities, and vary in terms of autonomy. Some communities have complete autonomy to adopt codes and develop statutes, while others are restricted by state regulations. General-purpose entities include county, municipal, and township governments. (See Section 10.4.3 of the Guide.)

Health care institutions are comprised of two levels or units. Public health focuses on health at the community level, whereas health care services typically treat individuals and families within a community. The public health system supplies many essential services, including: monitoring health status of a community, informing and educating individuals on health risks and protective behaviors, developing policies and plans to promote healthier communities, enforcing laws and regulations, fostering community partnerships, evaluating current health services, and conducting research. At the individual or family level, health care services promote, monitor, maintain, and restore health. Types of care delivered by health care providers within a community include preventative, primary, specialized, chronic or long-term, sub-acute, acute, rehabilitative, end-of-life, mental or behavioral health, and home health. (See Section 10.4.4 of the Guide.)

Education is the primary social institution dedicated to transferring knowledge, skills, and values from one individual or group to another. Formal education—in public, private, or home school settings—can begin in nursery school and continue through higher education in colleges and universities. Knowledge, skills, and values transfer in other ways within the education institution, including adult education (or continuing education), special education, and informal education. (See Section 10.4.5 of the Guide.)

Community Service Organizations (CSOs) are non-profit and non-governmental entities of varying sizes and missions that provide services to individuals around the U.S. These organizations tend to operate at a local level, often relying on volunteers to support minimal full-time staff. CSOs may assist individuals in meeting basic needs, such as shelter, food, and clothing, as well as providing emotional and mental health support. They may also enhance the overall quality of life in a community by engaging in work related to neighborhood revitalization, affordable housing, food security, accessible transportation, senior citizens associations, community sustainability, humanitarian response, medical relief funds, after school programs, youth homes and centers, skill building and education, and civic engagement. (See Section 10.4.6 of the Guide.)

Religious and cultural organizations, as well as other groups that support various belief systems, are important to society. Generally, organizations in this type of institution foster a sense of solidarity and common purpose. They also facilitate social cohesion, emotional support, and social control, and serve as an instrument for socialization. (See Section 10.4.7 of the Guide.)

Media refers to the channels of communication, including newspaper, magazines, television, and internet reporting, that disseminate information to large markets (e.g., the entire population of a country) and smaller markets (e.g., a community or specific demographic within a larger population). (See Section 10.4.8 of the Guide.)

[1] Each institution is discussed in more detail in Volume 2, Chapter 10 of the Guide.

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2. What needs to be done to identify the social institutions in a community?

Example Questions:

- What citizen groups and neighborhood organizations can help the planning team understand the various family and kinship dynamics in the community? Where are they located?
- What key business and financial institutions serve the community? Where are they located (within the community and in the broader region)?
- What/Who are the local government entities (e.g., county, municipal, and township), essential personnel (leadership and staff), and facilities (including communications) in the community? Where are these facilities and personnel located?
- What is the community's capacity with respect to providing health-related services? Where are these facilities and personnel located?
- What/who are the key education entities (public, private, and home school, as well as formal and informal), personnel (leadership and staff), and facilities (including communications) in the community? What are their capacities? Where are these facilities and personnel located?
- What/Who are the key service organizations and personnel (leadership, staff, and volunteers) in the community? What are their capacities? Where are these facilities and personnel located?
- What/Who are the key religious/cultural organizations and personnel (leadership, staff, and volunteers) in the community? What are their capacities? Where are these facilities and personnel located?
- What are the key media outlets that serve the community (both within the community and in the broader region)? Where are they located?

Obtaining answers to these broad questions—for at least the key organizations in the community—should further orient discussion among the collaborative planning team, as well as highlight additional organizations and individuals who might be included in resilience planning.

To identify social institutions in a community, the collaborative planning team may ask the social dimensions task group to facilitate development of an inventory of social institutions. At a minimum, this inventory should include the names, contact information, and locations of key organizations within the community. Depending on the institution, additional useful information includes the types of services provided, numbers and types of populations served, and other details that can help identify capacities, vulnerabilities, and potential gaps in the system on a daily basis and in the event of a disaster. This process might result in a single database for each of the eight social institutions or, possibly, a different database for each type of institution.

Specific approaches to identifying social institutions should be determined at the community level. This part of the process will be most effective if the social dimensions task group works closely with local representatives from each of the eight types of institutions who have a working knowledge of the community. Reaching out to local and regional entities, such as city or county planning departments, is also advised. As with characterizing the population (GB 8), the task group may consider collaborating with area institutions that likely have a vested interest in supporting community resilience activities, such as research centers, chambers of commerce, consulting firms, institutes of higher learning (e.g., departments of business, economics, geography, planning, political science, public administration, and sociology in universities and community colleges), and other organizations. These groups are most likely to be in a position to help identify sources of information and data that can contribute to the resilience planning process. They may also have access to GIS data to inform decisions about planning for resilience.

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A basic inventory can serve as a starting point to facilitate understanding of the organizational capacities and vulnerabilities in the community (see text box).

The task group should remember that the information needed to identify the social institutions and associated organizations may be available, although possibly not in a format that is useful or user-friendly. The information may not be available and, through this process, gaps in the necessary data may be revealed (e.g., perhaps there is not a complete, up-to-date list of community service organizations) so the information can be collected and added to the inventory. Again, it is beneficial to draw upon local or regional expertise to assist in identifying data resources and the information needed to advise the collaborative planning team.

Types of information that might be included in the inventory of organizations:

- Name of organization
- Primary point(s) of contact
- Telephone
- E-mail
- Mailing address
- Physical location (latitude and longitude)
- Types of services provided
- Types of populations served
- Types of facilities occupied
- Where employees live

3. Next Steps

Once the inventory of social institutions is complete, the task group should have the necessary information to work with the collaborative planning team as a whole to identify dependencies between community organizations and the local populations served by these organizations. GIS data can be used to map organizations (e.g., the types of services they provide and their locations) with demographic information about the local community (see Guide Brief 8—Characterize the Population) to visually represent connections between the social dimensions in the community.

Next, the data about the population and the social institutions should be mapped with information about the built environment (Figure 1). This will help show locations where social vulnerabilities intersect with different aspects of the built environment (e.g., where low income populations live relative to the services they need, such as health care, government assistance, and transportation to access these services). Access to technical expertise with GIS and mapping of this information will be helpful to engage in this activity. Combined, these data can be used by the social dimensions task group and by the collaborative planning team at large to discuss present and future (projected) needs for the social and built environments.

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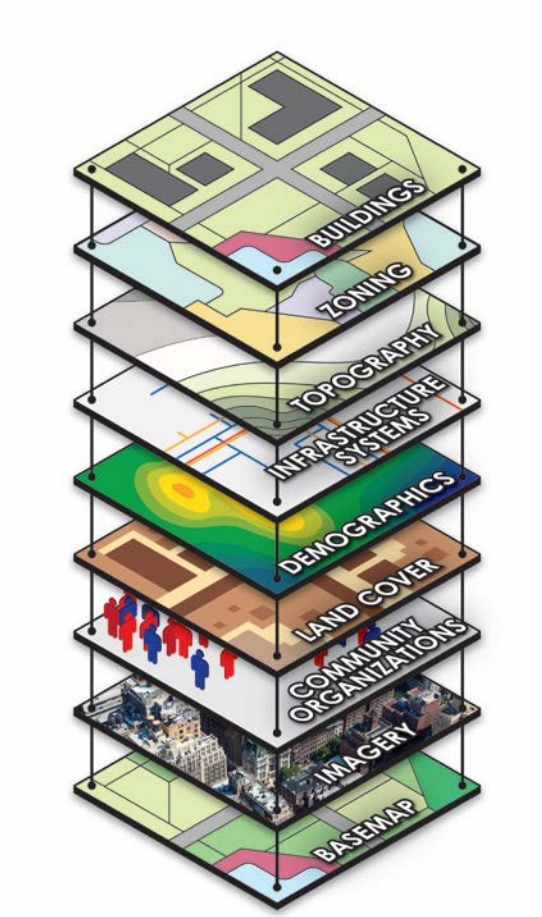

Many different types of data can be integrated into GIS maps, including parcels, land use zoning, topographical features, wetlands, demographic distribution, land use/land cover, buildings, infrastructure systems (e.g., transportation, water and wastewater, communications), and others. By adding detailed information about specific community organizations (e.g., the types of services they provide and their locations) to the maps, the planning team can consider local capacities to be incorporated in the resilience planning process. This type of visualization will also reveal dependencies and vulnerabilities of these organizations to damage of the built environment in the event of a hazard event.

Figure 1. Example of layers in a Geographic Information System [Adapted and redrawn, Ontario County New York 2016]

4. References

Ontario County New York. *GIS Program Background.* Ontario County New York, http://www.co.ontario.ny.us/index.aspx?NID=1176. Viewed August 16, 2016.

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