

**Context and Description** (what it is, definition, key elements, how, why to use)

A community grid is a stylized image of the community space divided up into five or six different sections which hold the reality of the local social geography. Gridding is a method which enables you to become familiar with a piece of geography and its sociality, and to create an image which holds this reality. It enables a group to form a consensus about how it intends to relate to a particular area. It is a first symbolic and practical step in taking responsibility for space by organizing it into meaningful geographic patterns based on the local reality.

**Instructions, steps to implement, detail of process,**

**1. FAMILIARIZATION: Become familiar with the community to be gridded**

a. by walking, driving or cycling through it on several different routes.

Involve residents and others who are familiar with the community from different perspectives. Go to city offices and get a map of the community, population figures, planning documents and anything else of use in getting a total picture of the community.

b. Pore over the community map, taking notes or marking on the map as you go: what do I notice? what are the natural features? What are the main lines on the map: roads, streets, rail lines, political boundaries? where do things converge to form nodes or gathering points? what colors do I see? what do they stand for? what shapes emerge from the map? what are some of the symbols on the map? what do they stand for? where do I see boundaries? districts? built up areas? open spaces?

c. Add information, using the same questions from your and the groups personal knowledge of the area. If there are areas you are not familiar with, visit them, or invite someone who is familiar with that aspect to join you. Discuss values to be used in gridding such as population size, our purpose and intent, etc.

**2. CONSTRUCT AN INITIAL PICTURE. Construct on paper your own**

rough drawing of the area. On it identify and mark: population centers, cultural, ethnic or other demographic aggregations, the major nodes (where do people gather), the identifying landmarks for the area, the natural features (rivers, lakes, hills, wooded areas, etc.), the various boundaries: natural, political (electoral, municipal, county), local (designated neighborhoods, natural communities), what people identify with, the arteries, pathways and other important infrastructure

**Resources needed**

- ++ Large butcher paper or cardboard and markers to draw with
- ++ Large maps of the community or aerial photographs
- ++ Baseline and demographic data where available
- ++ Access to the neighborhood for walking around and talking
- ++ Access to the neighbors who know what is really there

**Expected Product, Result or Outcome:**

**Keys, variations, cautions in making it work:**

Core homework in starting a project, Use as tool in developing focussed strategies, Debriefing of a van, bus or walking tour, Opportunity to engage residents in conversation, Clear plastic overlays for adding data, School project, Display as entry signs or bulletin boards for community information, Dots on grid informally show participation in gatherings, locations of problems, etc. Can use mapping software

Type of method: ORID, Charting  
Time needed: 3 hrs +  
Difficulty: Medium

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**3. SET THE BOUNDARIES AND CREATE THE INITIAL GRID** From an inspection of various boundaries on the map, decide which of them are the most appropriate boundaries of the community. Draw an initial picture of these boundaries -- superimposed on a map of the community, and then on a blank sheet of paper to see both the detailed reality and the overall shape of the community. When you are satisfied that you have the boundaries right, work on dividing the geography up into five or six parts to create the grid. Make sure no part has a preponderance of the population. Make sure each part makes sense currently and looking to the future.

**4. FORM A CONSENSUS ON THE GRID.** It is important that the grid you create have symbolic power, that it be a used and useful tool for yourselves and the community.

a. One way is to facilitate broad participation in its creation by involving people in #1-3, and also by displaying the grid superimposed on a map and inviting discussion and clarification by others.

b. Another way is to refine the drawing so that it is a simple, meaningful and easily remembered picture. To this end, make all lines normally straight, use a minimum number of lines (straighten out any minor dog legs, don't be too literal on angles and specifications. Work through half a dozen or so different ways to do the grid till you come up with one that seems on target. Keep working until an easily remembered story begins to emerge which makes sense of the actual community and its significance.

c. Draw a large artistic form of the grid and put it in a highly public place. Make a smaller version superimposed on a map as a working tool at all meetings. Find as many uses as possible for the grid. It can become a major means of building identity for the community.

**Resources needed**

**Expected Product, Result or Outcome:**

Deepened understanding of the reality of the neighborhood, a symbol to use in building identity in the neighborhood, an artistic background to use for the visual display of data, and a way to ensure inclusiveness in dealing with every part of the geography.

**Who to contact, how:**

**Keys, variations, cautions in making it work:**

1. Working tool, ok to be messy at first,
2. Participation (who participates most gets most out of it, learns most)
3. Aim is to deepen understanding of and effectiveness in working with community, not be "right". OK to express your understanding and learn
4. Needs to belong to the community,
5. Will change over time,
6. Needs to include visible and invisible features
7. Diversity of perspectives is good, it deepens understanding and insight

Type of method: \_\_\_\_\_

Time needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Difficulty: \_\_\_\_\_