

Peoples Next Door

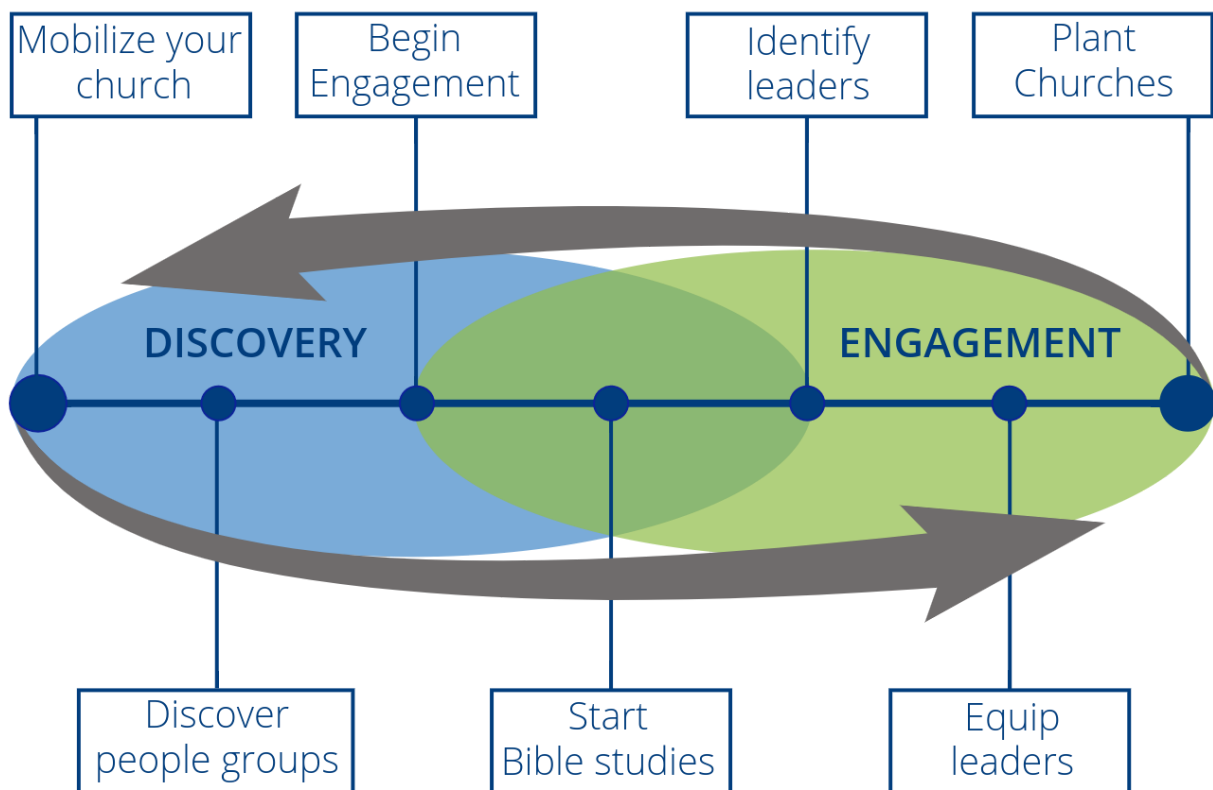
Mapping Guide

Using free Google products for people group mapping around your local church



In Acts 17, Paul reminds his listeners at the Areopagus that God determines the periods and boundaries of man, so that they can seek Him and perhaps find Him. God is doing something big, and he is doing it in your town, maybe even your neighborhood, right now. Over the course of 20-30 years, global migration patterns have increased to new highs. More people are moving from country to country than ever before, and many of those peoples are moving to North America. While doors into the hardest-to-reach nations are rapidly closing to missionaries, God is orchestrating a movement of these least reached peoples into the heartland of evangelical Christianity. The least-reached peoples are now in arms reach of your local church. So, the question is...what will you do about it?

The Peoples Next Door Project is an effort to equip local churches, associations, conventions, and others to discover and engage international people groups in North America. The following is a step-by-step strategy guide compiled from *The Peoples Next Door: A Primer for Reaching the Nations in Your Neighborhood*. The guide lays a foundation for this work in local churches. It is necessarily broad, and each church will want to apply these principles in their specific setting. However, by considering these broad steps, any church can begin the journey.



Introduction to Mapping

Every church needs to know the community around them. Many churches today knew their community at one time, but things change. When it comes to communities here in the US, that transition has happened quickly and everywhere.

Many (I would guess most) neighborhoods look different today than they did 10-15 years ago. In many places immigration has brought the nations into our neighborhoods. Today your new neighbor is as likely to come from Dehli as from Delaware. Nowadays, we have Hindu neighbors, Buddhist neighbors, Muslim neighbors, and all kinds of things in between.

And for those few neighborhoods that are not seeing international influx, they are nevertheless in transition. Gentrification is redrawing boundary lines for neighborhoods and there is a likely chance your community has different culture and values than it did before. If you ever plan to do effective ministry where you sit, then you need to know.

When I speak and teach on these transitions, it is most often met with wholehearted agreement and confused looks concerning where to start.

Every Church Can Research Their Neighborhood

At this point, it is too common to number. Virtually everywhere I go to work with churches or conventions, I meet people who feel they lack the expertise to do people group discovery in their community. This is simply not true. [We do not need cultural expertise to start the mission](#), we just need to be learners.

We have done ourselves a disservice in Evangelical denominations by convincing ourselves that ministry requires "ministry specialists." This is not true for evangelism. It is not true for discipleship. It is not true for missions. And it is not true for people group discovery around your church. While special research from agencies or institutions can be helpful from time to time, what a church really needs is to go out into their own community and collect their own information. And honestly, it is not hard to do.

When your local church gathers its own research on your community, it is your church members who have developed the relationships necessary to get that info. That is huge when it comes to missions. Instead of being handed a spreadsheet full of numbers that make little more than sermon talking points, your church members have walked into businesses and met real neighbors. They know real names and real locations.



Furthermore, compiling this information to get a clearer picture of your community is not hard either. In fact, there are a number of easy, free tools nowadays that basically compile that information for you. Here is one simple method.

Use Google for Mapping

When local churches come to wanting to map out their neighborhood, I do not send them to some fancy mapping software and census data. I send them to Google Maps.

By this point, most people have used Google maps, and many have used their productivity suite for documents, spreadsheets, and online forms. These tools are specifically designed to easy on new users, and they are basically ubiquitous at this point. And of course, they are free to anyone with a Gmail account. It is entirely possible to collect a great deal of helpful information on your community and visualize it using nothing but Google.

Google Forms

Google's online form creator is the starting point for creating a community survey system. It is easy to set up a form with a number of questions that provide insight. Just remember, less is more. The fewer questions you ask, the more likely your church members will get all the information.

When attempting to discover people groups, it is important to ask three specific questions. First, you will need to find out their country of origin. Second, you will want to ask what language they speak in the home. Finally, try and find out their religion. These three pieces of information together will usually identify an ethnolinguistic people group.

In addition, you will need to take down basic information on the establishment you visit. Have spots on the form for the name and address of the establishment. It is also good to note the type of establishment, whether it is a restaurant, hair braiding salon, international market, etc.

After the form is complete, you will have a link to distribute to church members. Google Forms are responsive, and so they will pull up nice and easy on a smartphone. In fact,

The image shows a Google Form titled "Geocode Baltimore". The form has a header with the title and a red asterisk indicating that the title is required. Below the header are four questions, each with a red asterisk indicating they are required. The questions are: "What is your church, organization, or name?", "Name of Point of Interest", "Street Address", and "City". Each question has a text input field below it. The form is displayed on a light gray background.

Geocode Baltimore
* Required

What is your church, organization, or name? *
This way, we can know who pinned this location for the research.
Your answer

Name of Point of Interest *
Give us the name of the business, shop, store, or any other point of interest that can be connected to a specific nationality (or people group).
Your answer

Street Address *
Just the street number and name here, please.
Your answer

City *
Your answer



with most smart phones, you can pin the form directly to the home screen of the phone like it is an app. That way, your church members are one tap away from filling out information on a new place they visit.

Of course, it should go without saying that walking into any establishment with your phone in your hand filling out the form as you talk would be rude. People are much more likely to be curious (and not in a good way) if they feel like they are being monitored. That is not the purpose or spirit of gathering this kind of information, so have church members hold off on the form until after they leave.

Finally, after creating the form and using it, there is a responses tab that provides aggregated information on all of your submissions. How many Indian restaurants have you found? Well, this tab can show you. It will show you the percentages of nationalities or pie chart of languages depending on how you build the form. The more information that is entered, the clearer the picture becomes. However, the good stuff is still to come.

Google Sheets

This is where this whole process gets cool. Every Google form automatically builds a Google spreadsheet. It is built right into the Google Drive account where the form was created.

Every time someone fills out the form, a new line of information is automatically entered into the same spreadsheet. This becomes your community database without any effort. As your members use the form, the amount of information you gather on the community grows and this spreadsheet becomes more valuable.

You can use the responses tab mentioned above to see certain visualizations of the information. It will automatically create pie charts and other relevant information from the data you collect. However, to really visualize this process, you need the spreadsheet.

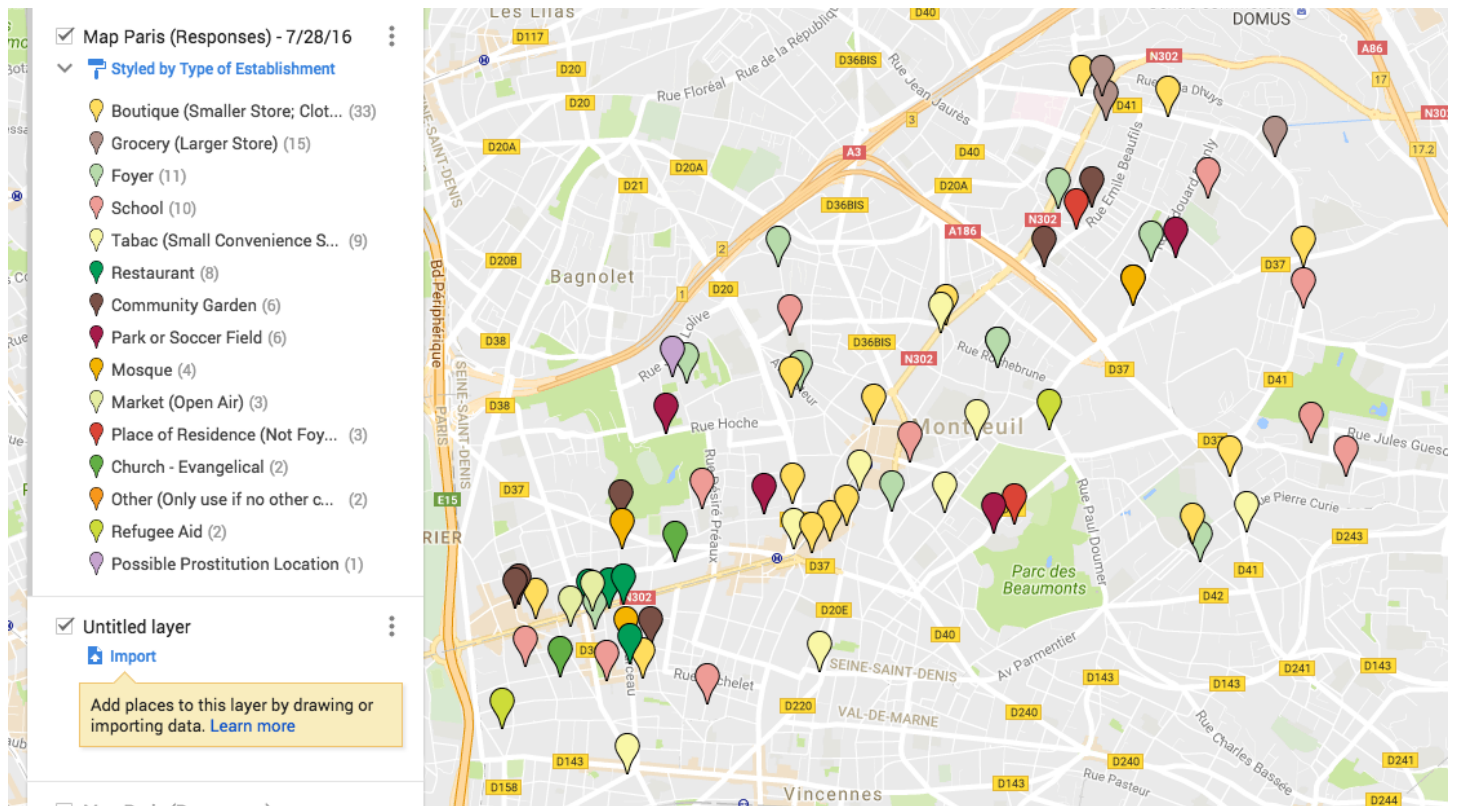
Google Maps

Google Maps has a section called My Maps and here you can build your own, editable maps. It is possible to place points one at a time in a map and fill in information on them, or you can bulk import information directly from a Google spreadsheet. See where this is going?

As your Google sheet gets big enough, you can go to My Maps and import that Google sheet straight from the Drive account and it will geocode all of your data. Geocoding is the fancy way of saying that it will place all of the points of interest that you gathered on one map together. Of course, you must have the addresses built in as a question on that form, or it will not have the information necessary to map your community.

After importing the sheet, it will ask you which column of data to use in order to plot the points, and it will ask you which column of data to use for naming the points. This is why you need to know the name and address of every establishment. Once the points are plotted, it is possible to change the styles on them and color code them by either type of establishment or even nationality, language, or religion.





The result is a map full of places that are connected to different nationalities or people groups. This allows you to see who is now in your neighborhood, and it also shows you where they are. Add this knowledge to all the personal relationship development that occurred by having your own members find out the information, and you have some valuable missions research.

I encourage you to play with these features in Google Drive. After all, they are free, and pretty easy to use. Shoot me an email or a comment if you have any questions, and I would be happy to help your church start thinking through ways they can discover and engage the community around them.



Mapping Your Church Members

Many churches never consider mapping out their own membership, but they should. We talk a lot about hospitality today. There is no end lately to the blog posts and articles circulating the internet concerning the importance of hospitality in outreach and missions. I have several on this site.

Hospitality is an important aspect of ministry that Western Christians often struggle to incorporate into their lives. Compared to other areas of the world, we love our privacy, and our [home easily becomes our fortress of solitude](#). While homes should be a place for rest, the Bible challenges us to view them as tools for ministry. Can we honestly say we are stewarding God's gifts well when our single, biggest purchase is never used for outreach?

*Our homes are
staging grounds
for the
Great Commission.*

We should change this paradigm in our churches. Homes are not caves. They are not fortresses to protect us from the hectic world outside. They are gracious gifts from our Heavenly Father to be used, in turn, for his glory. This means opening your home up to others. Yes, it means having others from your church over, but it means even more than that. Use it as a staging ground for the Great Commission.

When was the last time you [invited unbelieving neighbors into your home](#)?

Seeing your church's geographic footprint.

As we encourage church members to open their homes up as a mission point in the community, it does something incredible. Suddenly, local church ministry shifts from having one central point of contact to dozens, or hundreds, scattered throughout neighborhoods all over the city.

A church, as with any group, has different types of footprints. There are social footprints, or the web of relationships connected to your church. There are missions footprints, or all the places hearing the gospel because of your church's labor. And there are geographic footprints, or all the places membership reside around the city. Every one of these serves as a touch point into a community.

Often, churches have no idea where their membership lives. Sure, the information is on a roll somewhere, or stuck in a mailing list. Unfortunately, addresses in a list do little to capture a church's geographic footprint. Has your church ever looked at its geographic footprint?



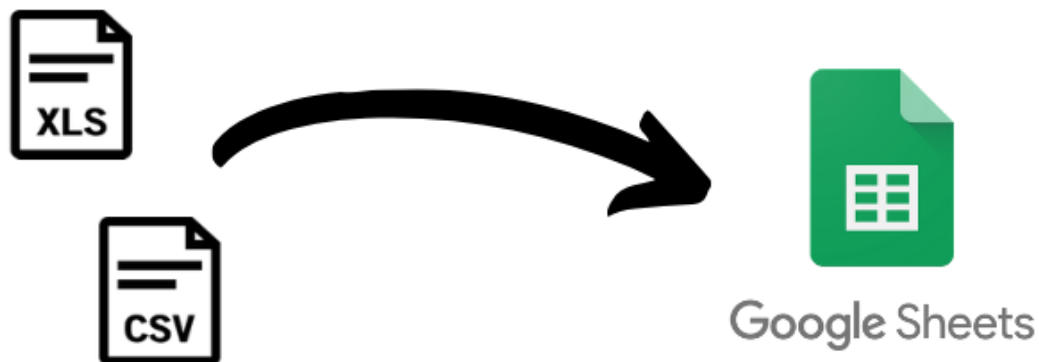
Creating the Member Map

The following steps are similar to the instructions above for mapping your community. However, most churches have an existing membership database or spreadsheet already. Instead of collecting this information, most churches will simply need to import it to Google drive in order to create a map layer for their congregation.

Import spreadsheet to Google.

The first step is getting your membership addresses all into the same spreadsheet and uploading that to Google Drive. As noted above, most churches have a spreadsheet of their membership laying around somewhere. If your church is large enough to have database software, then it is most likely as simple as exporting the membership directory as a CSV or XLS file.

Uploading to Google Drive is very easy. Using the same Google account where you are gathering mapping information on your community, open drive.google.com on any modern web browser. You can simply drag the file into the drive and it should upload.



Convert it to a Sheets file.

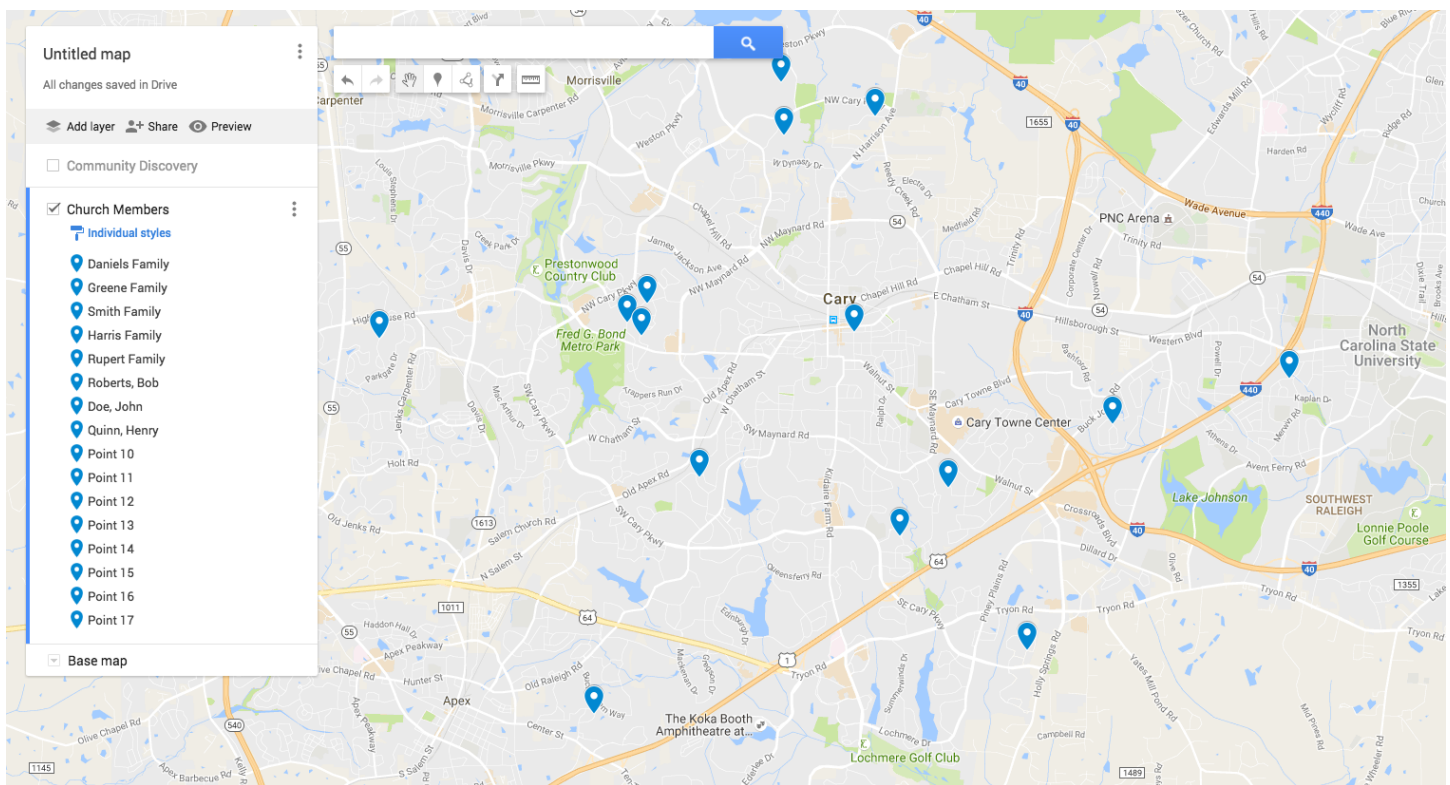
This next step makes using the data easier in Google Drive. It is possible to set Drive up to automatically convert any files you import to the corresponding Google file type. If you have not done so, simply right click on the file in Drive, hover over “Open with” and select Google Sheets. This will create a Google Sheets copy of the file.



Import as My Maps layer.

If you will remember from last week, Google Maps has an area called “My Maps” and you can build your own customs maps in this section. If you have not already done so, create a new map in My Maps. If you have started a map for community discovery, open that map.

On the left side of the screen is the map legend. Click on the “Add layer” button in that legend, and it will create an untitled layer at the bottom of the map legend. Two things will need to happen next. First, rename the layer to “Church Members.” Second, click the import button in that layer to import the membership directory spreadsheet you just created. Select upload from Google Drive and locate the membership sheet. The maps engine will give you a couple of prompts to make sure it is mapping based on the address column and naming the points correctly, and then it is finished!

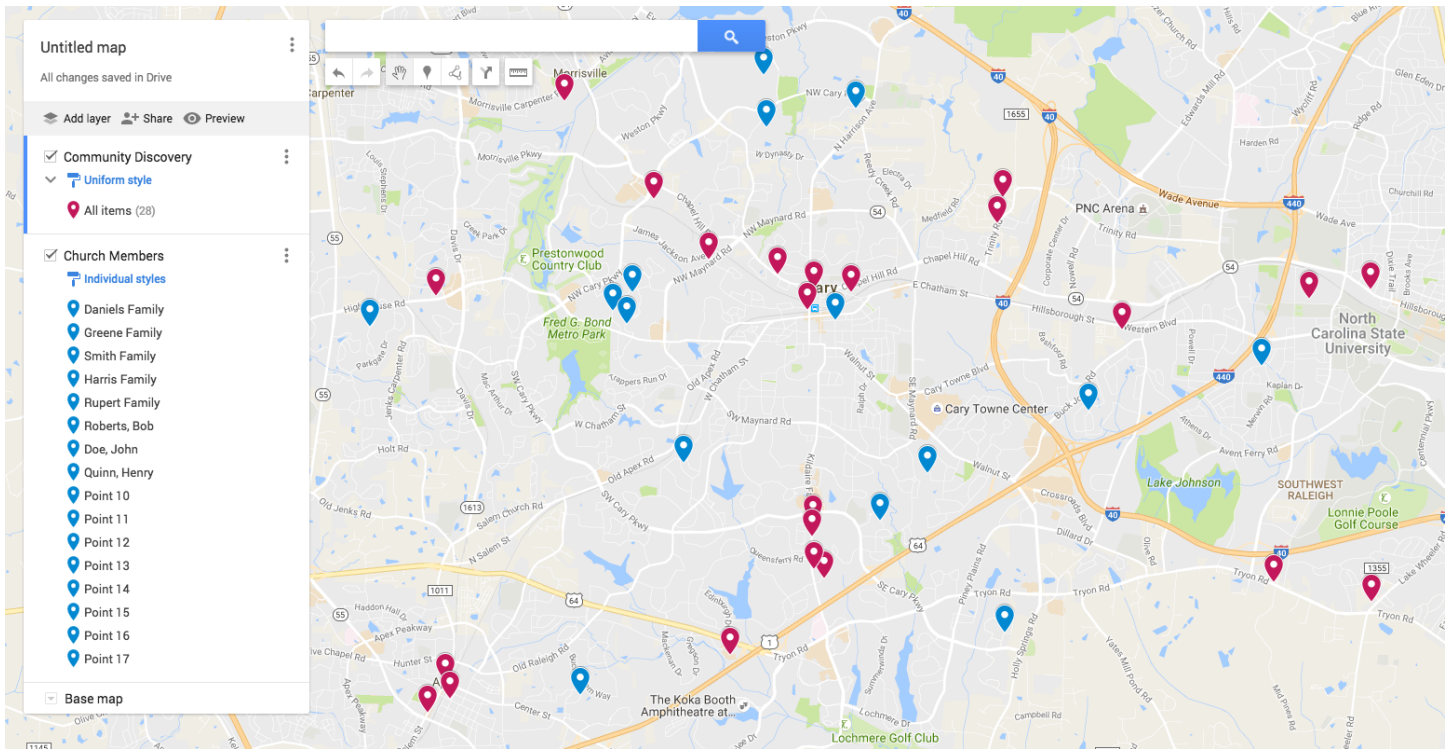


Compare with data from community discovery.

If you create this layer inside an existing map for community discovery, some really neat things can happen. By making them separate layers, you can cut them on and off. This will allow you to see all of the points of discovery for local outreach by themselves, or you can just visualize your membership. The cool part, though, is putting them both up at once. By seeing your points from community discovery plotted on top of your church’s geographic footprint, you are able to make all kinds of interesting connections. Do your church members live anywhere near the areas you want to reach? You may find



that you have neighborhoods full of church members and other neighborhoods where there are none. Finally, you can help members think through ministering to unbelievers in their own areas of the city.



This exercise only takes a few minutes, and it can really help a church begin the process of strategic local outreach. Feel free to shoot me any questions in a comment or email, and I would be happy to help you think through the ways your church can use this tool.



Additional Resources

If you're viewing a copy of this guide on your computer, each of the headings below links to the mentioned resource.

The Peoples Next Door Website

The website (peoplesnextdoor.com) is the best way to stay updated on the progress of this project, including regular resources, articles, and content. It is updated regularly with 2-3 articles per week and serves as the online home for all Peoples Next Door resources.

Interactive Checklist for Discovery and Engagement

Here is a helpful checklist for those beginning the work of people group discovery and engagement. The checklist is an interactive outline, which means you can pull it up in any browser and work through the ideas step-by-step. The outline is a quick reference guide for developing forms for collecting data, a bank of potential questions to ask when doing people group discovery, and even a few quick thoughts on engagement.

PND: Fourfold Panoramic Assessment

How to carefully examine your local church in its mission context. Too often, people attempt to revitalize, plant, or replant a church without a full view of the landscape. Two big categories must be considered in local church assessment: the local church itself, and the context they are attempting to reach. However, even that is not enough. In order to see accurately, it must be done from more than one angle. The following resource provides a snapshot of the examination process for each perspective in the panorama.

