Resources for Collaboration and Power Sharing Between Government Agencies and Community Power-Building Organizations

humanimpact.org/power-sharing-guide

CHAPTER 4
Sharing Organizational Charts
What is an organizational chart?

An organizational chart is a visual representation of the hierarchical structure within an agency or workplace. It depicts the landscape of offices, divisions, bureaus, and programs within the organization, as well as the location of supervisors and which positions report to them.

In government, organizational charts exist at multiple levels. A local agency’s chart could include every staff position within the agency, while a chart for an entire state government might only show the structure of the relationship between various agencies and departments. Some private and non-profit organizations use these charts as well.

Some government organizational chart examples include:

- **County Level:** [El Paso County Public Health](#)
- **State Level:** [North Carolina State Government](#)
- **Federal Level:** [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Why should we share our organizational chart?

For government agencies, the practice of sharing organizational charts deepens relationships with partners and demystifies how and why agencies operate the way they do. The internal power structure and chain of command within government systems are often very opaque to external partners. Given the complexity of units, departments, and position titles, these systems can seem like a maze for people trying to understand who has influence over decision making and what content is being worked on by whom — and thus, how to make change.

Pulling back the bureaucratic veil is a way that public institutions can meet their democratic obligations to transparency and accountability to the people they serve. Governments practice transparency through many mechanisms, such as satisfying open meetings requirements, fulfilling freedom of information requests, and publishing salaries. While it may not be intentional, keeping organizational charts concealed or hard to access or understand can function to withhold power from partners and the broader public.

Health departments and other government agencies can practice sharing power by showing their charts and taking time to discuss them with partners. Community power-building organizations (CPBOS) can use the chart as a tool to demystify the internal hierarchy, relationships, work content, and decision-making processes within government to be more effective in their advocacy efforts.
Organizational Chart Sharing Activity

Why:
The purpose of this activity is to encourage power sharing and clarify the structure of government agencies for their community partners. The activity requires government agencies to identify key divisions and individuals whose work relates to partners’ priority issues and who hold influence and power over decision making within the agency.

This activity is designed for government agencies to share their charts with community partner organizations. In some cases, partner organizations may also have their own organizational charts. While they can be invited to reciprocate and to repeat the process for their own organization if appropriate, the activity focuses on government agencies.

Who:
This activity should be undertaken between government agencies and CPBOs and/or other community partners with whom the agency is building a relationship or partnering on an initiative. From the government agency side, this activity should be done by a small group of 2-4 staff with some level of leadership and influence, who are committed to holding and deepening long-term, trusting relationships with community partners. We recommend a small group to encourage candid conversations. Community partners can make a strategic decision about how many people and which people from the organization should participate.

What you’ll need:

If Virtual:
- A virtual copy of your agency’s organizational chart, or a portion of the chart that is most important to the initiative or campaign at hand
  - Ideally the chart should be shared in a format that allows for real-time collaborative annotation, such as on a Jamboard

If In Person:
- A printed copy or copies of your agency’s organizational chart, or a portion of the chart that is most important to the initiative or campaign at hand
  - This could be poster-sized version that everyone can look at together, or handouts for all participants
  - If using handouts, consider also displaying the chart on a PowerPoint slide
- Marker, highlighter, or colored pens

Time:
Depending on the depth and breadth of information being shared, this activity could take between two and three hours.
**Instructions**

1. **Welcome:** Welcome everyone to the space and do a round of introductions. Provide an overview of what an organizational chart is and why you want to share your agency’s chart. You can use the following script or adapt it to your needs:

   *The chart I’m going to share is a visual representation of the organization and hierarchy within [my agency]. As a public agency, we have an obligation to be transparent about our structure with the people that we serve — ultimately, the public are at the top of this chart and we are accountable to them.*

   *We recognize that the way decisions get made at public agencies can be confusing, so my hope is that through sharing this chart and discussing it today, you’ll be able to see how we’re organized, what kinds of work happen across our agency, and which departments and people work on your priorities.*

   *I also want you to see who has influence, which staff you might want to engage to influence those above them, and who has the ultimate decision-making power.*

2. **Introduce and walk through your agency’s chart:** If the meeting is in person, use highlighters and colored pens to mark up the chart as you walk through the questions below. If the meeting is virtual, you can do this on a Jamboard: place virtual sticky notes and/or circles on the chart as you discuss them.

   Key points to cover as you explain the chart are:

   a. An orientation to the larger landscape and overall structure of the agency or department, including the basic role of different departments/teams and who is the next decision-making person or body above the highest position in the organizational chart (e.g., Governor, Mayor, another higher-level agency, etc. who holds power over the agency/department). This should be a high-level overview to give partners the lay of the land, but don’t spend too much time on this part.

   b. An overview of which people or units are most relevant to the community organization’s specific goals or the initiative you’re partnering on.

   - Take time to point out and explain the roles of any important units whose names may not be descriptive or intuitive for people outside the agency. For example, a “Department of Injury Prevention” within a public health agency may do significant work related to transportation policy.
   - Explain/write out acronyms.
   - Look for departments and programs that include terms like community, equity, or engagement, and explain their role.
   - Describe the recent projects/initiatives those people or units have been working on and who they report to.

   c. Key relationships between the people and units on the chart.

   - Identify any key relationships that are not visually obvious from the chart, such as units that work together on relevant projects.
d. The influential people and offices relative to the community partners’ priorities.
   - Discuss both formal and informal power, e.g., identify the official decision makers within the agency, but also note whether certain staff have significant influence over the programs, policies, or these decision makers.
   - Give examples about recent decisions or policy changes that have been made at your agency and use the chart to show who was involved. If relevant, discuss different kinds of decisions, such as legislative vs. administrative.

e. Specific leadership or staff members that could be supportive of community partner priorities.

f. Relationships with additional agencies and/or departments outside of your own that are relevant to your community partner’s priorities (e.g. Housing, Education, etc.). Bring these to the community partner’s attention and ask if they have connections at those agencies.

g. Provide a walk through of how a real or hypothetical priority issue could be addressed and who would be involved. For example, the community partner might say, “We need increased funding for code enforcement for rental housing. How would that happen?” or “This community needs better access to COVID vaccines, who should we talk to?”

3. Q&A: Provide space for questions about the chart, the information shared, and how it might be used.

4. Outline Next Steps: Come up with concrete ideas for how to engage with the people and departments within the agency that you’ve discussed in a way that builds power and connections for community partners. These could include:

   a. Identifying agencies and/or departments that community partners want to be connected to and offering to arrange or host a meeting. We recommend that participants read HIP’s Building Relationships: How to Conduct a One-to-One resource to learn more tips on successfully beginning relationships with partners.

   b. Making introductions between community partners and specific agency staff.

   c. Sharing a report or information about a campaign from the community partners with someone higher up in your agency.

   d. Planning for a second strategic meeting about decision makers related to a specific campaign or policy priority of the community partners.

   e. Inviting community partners to a staff meeting to present on their work and/or share their members’ experiences navigating specific programs.

   f. Walking through specific agency processes with community partners (e.g. walk through steps of code enforcement, strategic planning, community engagement) and identify opportunities to improve the process.
Ready to continue building power for health equity? We recommend you move to Set 2: Activities to Deepen Your Power-Building Analysis. This resource dives deeper into power: what it is, how it works, and the most effective ways to wield and redistribute it in collaboration with communities.

**Completed this set of resources?**
Move on to **Set 2: Activities to Deepen Your Power-Building Analysis**

**About Human Impact Partners**

[Human Impact Partners](#) transforms the field of public health to center equity and builds collective power with social justice movements.

For more information about this resource, please contact [info@humanimpact.org](mailto:info@humanimpact.org).

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