

Activities to Deepen Your Power-Building Analysis

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power-analysis-guide](https://humanimpact.org/power-analysis-guide)

CHAPTER 3

Power Mapping

What is power mapping?

Power mapping is a tool to assess the power landscape in regards to a specific policy or practice change you're working toward (your "change target") and identify strategic pressure points.

The process involves generating a list of key players — partners, opponents, powerful influencers, and other interested parties — and mapping them across two dimensions:

- 1. Their power or influence in decision making around your change target**
- 2. Their support of or alignment with the change target**

Once key players are mapped, you can make a strategic plan to advance your change target by:

- **Increasing the power** of those who are already aligned, or in agreement, with the change target
- **Increasing support** for the change target among those who already have power

Why should we map power?

Power mapping creates a helpful visual of where power lies in decision-making around your goal. By identifying who has the power to block or advance your change target, you can focus organizing efforts for the biggest impact.

Power mapping is a tool many community organizers use to make gains for social movements. We encourage government agencies to engage with community power-building organizations during the power mapping process to deepen the work, strengthen community relationships, and share power.

For more background information and other power mapping examples, see these resources:

- Power analysis [presentation](#) and [book chapter](#) from SCOPE, a community-based organization focused on building grassroots power in Los Angeles
- [Mapping Power and Money](#), a guide in the Greater Boston Anti-Displacement Toolkit
- [Power Points](#), a Los Angeles-focused guide and worksheet by artist and designer Rosten Woo

Power mapping activity

Why:

The purpose of this activity is to deepen your understanding of the power landscape surrounding the change in policy or practice you're working toward. The process can uncover people or organizations who may not have been on your radar previously and help you identify next steps for shifting partners and opponents to help you reach your goal.

Who:

Invite 3-6 people to participate in power mapping. Who you invite depends on your change target and your current allies. You may choose to include people both within and outside of your agency; it is particularly fruitful to include partners across government and outside of government, such as community power-building organizations. We recommend including people who are aligned with your goal and represent diverse expertise and connections in order to cover a breadth of information about potential partners and opponents.

If you have a large team working towards the change target, you do not necessarily need to complete this activity with the entire group; you can complete the first pass with a small group and solicit further input at a larger meeting.

What you'll need:

If Virtual:

- Power mapping [Jamboard](#)

If In Person:

- Power mapping [Jamboard](#) and means of projection (so all can see)
OR
- Hard copies of the maps and tables on the Jamboard slides, such as hand drawn on butcher paper
- Sticky notes
- Markers

Time: This activity can take between an hour and two hours depending on the scope of your change target.

Instructions

1. Prepare for power mapping.

 Before you begin, identify:

- a. What is your change target?
Tip: Be as specific as possible. Example: Pass a rent control policy to promote keeping low-income families in X neighborhood in their homes.
- b. How does power and influence play out surrounding the change target? For example, what power dynamics or structural issues and opportunities already exist?

- c. What does it mean to be aligned with your change target? For example, what values, expectations, or shared understanding underlie your goal?
- d. Which key partners and opponents should be mapped?

Tip: You can use the brainstorm questions from the landscape analysis resource to generate your list. Example: local politicians, affordable housing groups, racial justice organizations, community leaders, etc.

You can answer these questions multiple ways:

- **Meet as a group** to discuss and answer these questions together. Depending on the size of the group, this could take up to an hour.
 - **Use the Jamboard** and ask group members to answer these questions individually using sticky notes on the board ahead of the power mapping session. Then discuss and find consensus on the answers to these questions during the first 15-20 minutes of the power mapping session.
 - **Answer the questions on your own** and check your assumptions with the group during the first 15 minutes of the power mapping session. Find group consensus on the answers to these questions (especially questions a and c) before progressing.
- 2. Place partners and opponents on the map:** On the blank map on [slide 4 of the Jamboard](#), use sticky notes to place people and organizations according to their power or influence over decision-making *and* their support or alignment with your change target. Make sure to find consensus with the group on the sticky note placement.
 - 3. Make meaning of the map:** When the power map is complete, it's time for the team to consider how to:
 - a. **Increase the power/influence** of those who are already aligned with you
 - b. **Increase the support/alignment** of those who already have power/influence

Before you begin, review the map on [slide 3 of the jamboard](#) to think about what each of the quadrants represents:

Fill out the first 3 columns of the table on [slide 5 of the jamboard](#) as a group. Use these prompting questions:

- Who should we consider shifting and why?
- In what way do they need to shift (power or support)?
- What would it take to shift them? (e.g. time, investment, alliance-building, etc.)

Then evaluate which partners/opponents you'd like to prioritize targeting based on the amount of work it would take to shift their power or standpoint. Fill out the last column with either "yes" or "no" accordingly.

- 4. Make an action plan:** Once you have filled out the table, the team can assign next steps to individuals. Who will do what by when? Be strategic, and make use of each team member's unique skills and relationships. For example:
 - Someone who already has the ear of a powerful individual on the map could continue to build that relationship and increase their alignment with the change target through one-on-one meetings

- Someone who works in government could advocate for including an aligned community organization in an advisory board to increase their power and influence over the change target

Tip: If you have completed a Landscape Web, it can come in handy at this step!

Troubleshooting power mapping issues

Power mapping should take no more than 2 hours. If it turns into a several hour, multi-day conversation, there was likely a hiccup earlier in the process. Here are some common mistakes to avoid:

- **The change target is too broad.**
 - Solution: Narrow the change target as much as possible. For example, a broad target like “advance equitable practices in the health department” can be broken down into more specific practice changes, such as “pass an internal policy to reimburse community members in cash/check for their input in health department initiatives.”
- **The list of key opponents and partners is too extensive.**
 - Solution: Cull the list to those who have the most power/influence and those who most support your change target. Those who are against your change target but have little influence over the decision can be cut first.
- **You have too little knowledge of the partners and opponents.**
 - Solution: Pause to do some research on the potential partners and opponents – specifically their power over and alignment to the change target – before returning to mapping.
- **Your team does not agree on the meaning of power or alignment in relation to the change target.**
 - Solution: Take time to get on the same page about these things before returning to mapping. If your group feels stuck in understanding power, it may help to use the activities in the Assessing Your Power resource to unearth definitions and find shared meaning.

About Human Impact Partners

[Human Impact Partners](http://www.humanimpact.org) transforms the field of public health to center equity and builds collective power with social justice movements. www.humanimpact.org

For more information about this resource, please contact info@humanimpact.org.

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