

Power Mapping: Step by Step¹

1. Determine your target.
2. Map influence of the target.
3. Determine relational power lines.
4. Target priority relationships.
5. Make a plan.

Step 1. Determine your target

A power map is a visual tool and should be drawn. The map starts with a person or institution you want to influence – this is your target. Power maps are often worked out for the purpose of solving a problem. The person or institution that can solve this problem is usually the target or center for the map. Often the targets are decision makers or committees.

Example: Wal-Mart is trying to build a giant new building in your community

The city zoning commission is considering a special rewrite of the town's ordinances to accommodate a new Wal-Mart. Your group opposes efforts to rewrite local laws to accommodate Wal-Mart. The zoning commission has the final say over any changes to the ordinance. Two members are opposed, two members are in favor. One member of the commission, John Smith, is undecided. Your group has decided to influence John Smith to ensure that he votes against the zoning re-write. The group is developing a power map to determine how to best influence commissioner Smith.

Step 2. Map Influence of your Target(s)

Think of all the associations who have a relationship with this target. Think broadly. These can include work, political, family, religious, and neighborhood ties. Anyone who can exert influence on this individual should be mapped.

Be creative – even if you decide you do not want to target, for example, the commissioners' family, putting them up on the map might give you ideas on other avenues of influence.

Be strategic – Elected officials are easy to map. Look at all the major donors and constituency groups he has interacted with in the past, present and future.

Be Thorough – Spend some time thinking about John Smith from every different angle. Once you are satisfied, start thinking about what *these* people and institutions are connected to. A good power map will have major influences mapped out, outlining multiple degrees of separation.

Step 3: Determine Relational Power Lines

Take a step back and review the network you've created. Some of these people and institutions not only connect to John Smith, but also to each other. You might find that John Smith is a member of the local historical society but so are his wife, pastor and mayor. The historical society connects many of the influences in Joe's life. These connectors are called "nodes of power" within a given network.

¹ *Democracy for America Campaign Academy Grassroots Campaign Training Manual, 2009.*

These nodes don't always connect directly to the target. If Joe was not a member of the historical society, but his wife, pastor and mayor were all members, the historical society could still be a major influence on Joe. Power mapping sometimes reveals surprises.

Also some of these networks may connect directly to your or your group. Maybe Joe Smith's next door neighbor is in your car pool.

Step 4: Target Priority Relationships

Now analyze some of the connections and make some decisions. One way to do this is to circle the few people that have the most relational power lines drawn to them (the historical society and the mayor). Consider attempting to involve these people through your group's current relationships. If no one in the group has any influence over these nodes of power, it may be useful to do a power map around that institution or person to help you figure out how you can influence them. Your power map will begin to resemble a web. Don't worry if it gets a little messy.

Another consideration might be a person or institution in the map that doesn't necessarily have many different relational lines running to him/her/it, but nonetheless has a few critical ones and seems very influential. If you can identify a priority person/institution for which there isn't a clear relationship, then you might want to encourage the group to find out more about this person/institution.

As you get used to power mapping you can draw more complex maps. Many problems will have multiple decision makers. For example you may start to draw the target's most influential relationships closest in proximity to the name in the physical map. You might use different colors to indicate whether the person or institution is friendly to your position, unfriendly, or unknown.

Step 5: Make a Plan

The power map itself is a first step in figuring out an advocacy organization's strategies. After the map is completed, it is used to decide how and where to take action.

