



Power Mapping

A framework for problem solving through relationship building

Power mapping: A powerful tool to analyze power relationships and to help develop a strategy for creating change. Power mapping is particularly helpful in coalition building (With whom should we develop a relationship?) and in citizen lobbying (Who can we use to influence this legislator?).

The goal is to visually map out relationships between people, organizations, and institutions in a given context in order to understand the value of these relationships.

A power map reveals avenues of influence available to an organization. The method allows a group to see how a particular target is influenced and to see connections between these influences.

For example, you might want your state legislator to sponsor a bill. Understanding the relationships your state legislator has within his or her district can help you make your case. You might discover that one of the district's largest political donors has a stake in the issue your bill pertains to. You might even discover that AAUW is connected to that legislator through another organization with whom you work. You can leverage that donor (by lobbying) or that organization (through the relationship you already have) to help you make the case to your targeted legislator.

Power Mapping Step-by-Step

Step 1: Determine your target

A power map is a visual tool; it should be drawn. The map starts with a person (e.g., state legislator) or institution (e.g., government department) 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 who can solve this problem is usually the target for the map. Often targets are decision-makers.

Step 2: Map influence of 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 is mapped.

Be creative. Even if you decide not to target, for example, the commissioner's 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. Do some research.

Be thorough. Spend some time thinking about your target 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 the people and institutions will not only connect to your target, but also to each other. These connectors are called "nodes of power" within a given network. These nodes don't always connect directly to the target. Power mapping sometimes reveals surprises. Also, some of these networks may connect directly to you or AAUW.

Step 4: Target priority relationships

Now analyze some of the connections and make decisions. One way to do this is to circle the few people that have the most relational power lines drawn to them. Consider attempting to involve these people through your state's or branch's current relationships. If no one within AAUW has any influence over these nodes of power, it may be useful to do a power map around that institution or person to help 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 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. What are some possible strategies for AAUW?