Power Mapping

Be strategic when selecting the target of your advocacy. You may want to provoke legislative change, demand corporate social responsibility, or shift public opinion. This power mapping process will help you decide.

As your student chapter plans advocacy initiatives—and as you build your own capacity as an advocate—it is critical to analyze the power structures involved in the policies and processes you are advocating for or against. This kind of analysis will ensure your action is as effective as possible in both moving policy and in moving people:

- Who has the power to make the change you want, and is most vulnerable to the kinds of pressure you can mount?
- Who are your allies? Who could be your active supporters?
- Who will actively oppose you?
- How can we reach the people in power?

One process tool for this is called power mapping. Power mapping allows advocacy groups to systematically lay out power dynamics across your campaign so you can focus in on your main target—the one who can make the change you want to see—while also illuminating other potential connections and recognizing opposition so you can minimize it. Power mapping is used by organizations across the globe to: forge alliances; build support; do the most targeted actions; be politically relevant and strategic; and build awareness and legitimacy of your group.

**Step One: Setting the Stage**

To begin the process of power mapping, identify all of the stakeholders and actors involved in your particular issue. One helpful matrix to do this mapping is the power mapping table included below—it helps you map out your campaign allies, beneficiaries, opponents, decision makers, and those who influence the decision makers—all key power relationships to win a campaign.

- **Allies:** People who are “on your side” either because they will benefit directly or because they share the same objectives and want to help bring about these changes as part of a broader movement. These are the people and groups who are already active on your issue or those you want to enlist and you think you can get on board. Ask yourself: who can you bring into this campaign as stakeholders and supporters?
- **Beneficiaries:** People whose lives will be improved by the successful achievement of your advocacy goals. They can also be called “allies” but without additional organizing, a beneficiary is often a more passive stakeholder than an ally.
- **Opponents:** People who are opposed to what you’re trying to do and are likely to actively oppose you. Some of these people could become allies in time, with greater understanding of the issues, or could be standing in the way of what you’re trying to do. Adversaries can become targets of your advocacy project if you are planning a series of activities to “win them around.” Also, it is useful to not allow your campaign to get distracted by passive opponents—those who will not actively oppose you, or who do not have the ear of your targets. Ask yourself: how can you ensure the opposition stays at least
neutral—and that your actions do not necessarily inflame them to put opposing pressure on policy makers? Can you make any opponents into allies with specific outreach strategies?

- **Decision Makers:** Those with the authority or power to make the desired change. Look at your list of decision makers and compare it to your objective and the policy/budget you are trying to change, and find the targets you have the greatest number of routes to reach. Ask yourself: are they vulnerable to influence? Accessible or accountable to your constituency or allies?

- **Influencers:** Those who through their position, relationship, knowledge, or status are able to influence those with the power of decision making, or the direction of policy changes. Ask yourself: who do you know who has the ear of your target? How can you influence them to move the target towards your position?

**Step Two: Identifying Targets**

Now that you have mapped out the overall power dynamics in your campaign, it is time to focus on mapping out your targets. A “target” is the person who has the power to give you what your group wants in your campaign. A target is a person, not a faceless institution. Your constituency can easily imagine and express power over a person—but how can anyone have power over “the government” or “the International Monetary Fund”? In addition, individual decision makers have more incentive to respond to actions targeted at them directly, versus at a committee, or a larger government body—their names and their position are on the line, so they are more likely to respond.

There are two kinds of targets: primary targets and secondary targets. The primary target is the person or institution with the ultimate power. This may include Senators and Congressmen, Medical School Deans, local elected officials, or others who hold the power to make the change you want to see.

Secondary targets are people who can influence your primary target. The opinions and actions of these “influencers” are important in achieving the advocacy objective in so far as they affect the opinions and actions of the decision makers. Some members of a primary audience can also be a secondary audience if they can influence other decision makers. For example, the President and the Secretary of State might influence one another’s opinions. Therefore, they are both a primary audience (“targets”) and a secondary audience (“influencers”). In addition, your secondary audience may contain oppositional forces to your objective. If so, it is extremely important to include these groups on your list, learn about them, and address them as part of your strategy.

**Some secondary targets may include:**

- Relatives
- Leaders of target’s party
- Business associates of the target
- Personal Assistants or staff
- Formal/informal advisors to the target
- National opinion leaders

**A special note on targets**
What does it mean to say target? The term “target” does NOT always imply that we are attacking them—but that they are the decision makers who are key and around whom you should focus your efforts. Advocacy can often be most effective when you approach your targets as colleagues versus adversaries: you are still targeting them and their power, but in a collaborative light. Or, to make change, you may have to use more aggressive tactics towards your target—either way, the target is the person who has the power to give you what you want, and it may or may not be strategic to treat them as an adversary.

You can have more than one target for a campaign, although in general, fewer are better and allow you to be more focused. There will often be a progression of targets on the way to victory in a complex campaign. If a “primary target” is determined too hard to reach, but critical for your issue, you can make your secondary target your main target—so if you can’t reach, say, the President, but you know he listens to a certain cabinet member, target that person primarily to reach the President.

Power mapping is an art, not a science. And things change. So think about the criteria listed in this power-mapping worksheet, but know they can be flexible. Targets totally depend on your objective, so targets in one campaign might be allies in another. Be flexible and ready to shift your targets and allies as the situation changes.

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