

Learning activity

Power Mapping for Bottom Up Organizing

TIME: 3 hours

LEARNING AIMS:

- Facilitate naming of key social forces that relate to a particular transnational issue
- Visualize the interconnection between local forces and those that span national borders
- Prepare participants to strategize about how to influence large scale change via bottom-up organizing

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 5-30

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS: Write text For an in-person training session, the facilitator should prepare a blank power map and have large post-it notes (in different colors) and markers that can be used to populate the power map with the group. It is not necessary, but if you are working with groups who are involved in already existing campaigns, you may wish to ask participants to do some pre-thinking on the subject of the exercise by having them answer questions such as, “what is the issue and who are the people, organizations, or institutions that could most affect the outcome of your campaign at the local level?” This will also help the facilitator should research be needed for step 6 of the curriculum flow.

FRAMING:

Many of us have had the experience of going to a large protest and wondering, “what is going to happen after this?” Whether the protest was a large international mobilization, or a spontaneous national response to a crisis event, the sense that our protests may not be as rooted in local communities as they need to be, or that they will not have the staying power required to win, is real. The idea of organizing “locally rooted, internationally coordinated” campaigns is offered as an alternative way of focussing movement energy. There will still be the need for large protests, but this approach is about building movements that can become transnational in scale, while growing real social embeddedness in local communities.

This training is designed to tease out these questions and to move from the theoretical to the practical by thinking about the actual people, organizations and institutions that are on the “playing field” of our issue. Participants are asked to reflect on the interconnectedness of the local to the transnational, and should leave more prepared to develop a concrete road map for their campaigns that are based on local issues and run by local leaders, all while being connected to a larger organizing project.

FACILITATION:

Step 1. Introduction

Welcome participants to the space and introduce yourself as a facilitator. Ask participants to introduce themselves.

Step 2. Pair Share

Facilitators should give the prompt: “Discuss with another participant a time when you felt a campaign you were working on had crossed over from being something for activists, to something that ‘normal people’ cared about.” Facilitators can model this by sharing a short story from their own experience before sending people into pairs.

Step 3. Introduction to the power mapping tool

The facilitator shows the power map and describes how it is used, explaining the meaning of the vertical and horizontal axes, and the goal of moving the “power players” towards the campaign’s goal and long term agenda. If there is very low familiarity with this tool in the group, the facilitator can also contextualize the exercise by sharing examples of how this tool was developed by community organizers and has been used by them over many years to both plan and make ongoing assessments of their campaigns. The facilitator should also make sure to point out that this is a great tool for building the leadership of volunteers because if they are asked to fill it in as a group exercise it can build a much stronger sense of investment in the campaign.

Step 4. Populating the power map at the local level in small groups

Facilitator breaks participants into small groups. If there are participants working on the same local campaign in the room, it is advisable to group these people together. After distributing the post-it notes (each group should get its own color) and markers, the facilitator asks the participants to brainstorm who are the “power players” on the map of their local organizing. This can be explained using examples from the facilitator’s experience. Prompts to help the participants understand the assignment can be given such as:

- Who is the person or people who ultimately have a vote or final say over the decision you are trying to influence?
- What organizations or institutions are those people part of?
- What organizations or institutions generally agree with your desired outcome? Who disagrees?
- With whom do you work with now?
- With whom would you like to work with but don’t currently have a relationship?
- Who has a stake in the outcome of this decision – good or bad?

The facilitator can encourage participants to try to assess the power of the people and institutions they brainstorm, but this should not be emphasized at this point. The main goal at this stage is for the groups to do a complete brainstorm of as many groups and individuals as they can to populate the map.

Step 5. Group Sharing

Each group is asked to share the results of their brainstorm. As they do so, the facilitator asks participants to bring up their power players and asks them to place them on the power map at the front of the room. At this point, the facilitator can ask presenters to think where they would put that

power player on the map's vertical axis to rate their power. If time allows, use this time to gently interrogate the thinking of participants on this question, and involve the larger group in the discussion as well. The aim here is to help the participants develop a realistic assessment of the power that they have and their opponents have.

Step 6. Mapping Transnational Actors

In the large group, the facilitator now facilitates a conversation about the transnational dimension of the power map. This can start with a brainstorm on what international institutions or power brokers have influence over the local power players on the map. This might be government or economic actors, it might also be political actors or broader movements. This may be harder for participants to think about than the local power players because it is less visible to them. Therefore the facilitator may need to come prepared with some suggestions to start populating the map. For this reason it is helpful to have participants share in advance of the training if possible the local issue area on which they are working in case some research by the facilitator is necessary to come prepared.

Conclusion and take aways

Once this collective power map is built, what should emerge is a picture of multiple local campaigns (each with their own color of post-its) and associated transnational power brokers. To conclude the map-building process, the facilitator should ask participants to look for similarities and differences, and interconnections they may see on the map. Are there similar transnational power brokers that show up in more than one place? Are there local campaigns that share common root causes? Etc.

The facilitator concludes the exercise by reiterating that this is a tool for planning and assessing campaigns, so the next step (which is not being done today) would be to start planning campaign strategies to move the power players on this map towards our campaign demands and long term agenda.

SOURCE: Adapted from European Community Organizing Network

Other materials on the practice of power mapping can be found here:
<https://commonslibrary.org/power-and-power-mapping-start-here/>

IMAGES:

Power Map

