HOW TO

Build a Power Map

A Power Map helps you see who has influence over the issue you care about and how you can move them. It's a tool to build smarter strategies by identifying who supports your goals, who doesn't (yet), and where your advocacy can make the biggest impact.

Step 1: Define the Issue

Start with a clear, specific goal. Ask yourself:

1. What change do we want to see?
2. Who has the power to make that change happen?
3. What barriers or opposition might we face?

Keep your focus narrow and only on one decision, one policy, or one moment in time.

EXAMPLES

1. **Expanding access to paid family leave in South Carolina.**
2. **Ensuring reproductive health care remains accessible statewide.**
3. **Increasing child care funding for working parents.**
4. **Protecting gender-inclusive policies in public schools.**

Step 2: Identify the Primary Target

Who has the authority to make this decision? This person (or small group) is your primary target.

1. A legislator who can introduce, block, or vote on a bill.
2. A committee chair who decides what gets a hearing.
3. A state agency director or local official who enforces policy.

EXAMPLE

The chair of a House committee that decides whether a maternal health bill gets a hearing. Focus on real people, not institutions, as influence flows through relationships, not just titles.

Step 3: Map the Circle of Influence

Next, ask: Who influences your target? These are the people or groups that shape your target's decisions, both directly or indirectly.

- Colleagues or staff
- Community leaders or faith organizations
- Local business owners
- Advocacy coalitions
- Major donors
- Family or close friends
- Constituents or respected experts

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EXAMPLE **A legislator might listen to a trusted pastor, local hospital CEO, or parent advocacy group.**

Step 4: Identify Supporters and Opponents

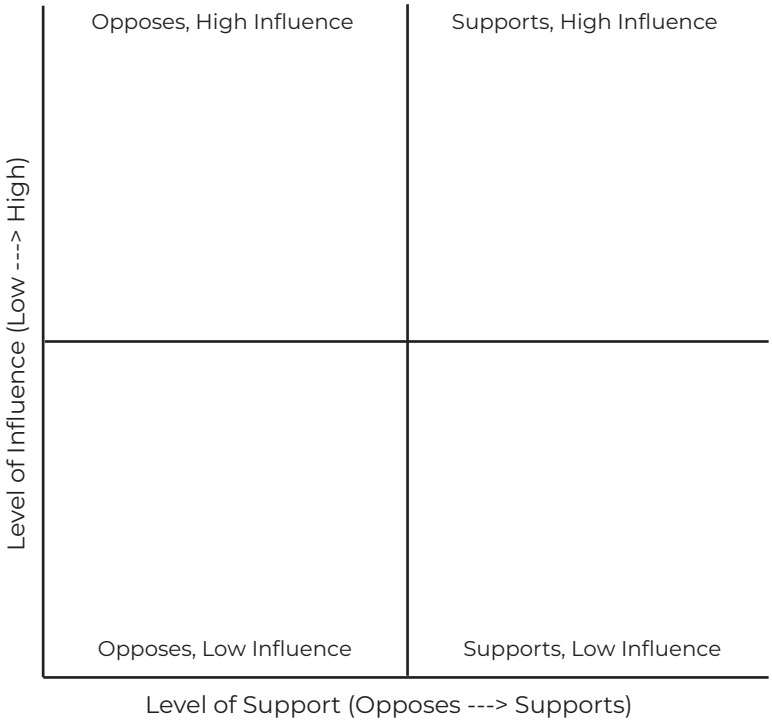
Now, draw your map. Start with your target in the middle. Add other names and organizations around them based on influence and support.

Use two simple axes:

1. Horizontal: Level of support (opposes ---> supports)
2. Vertical: Level of influence (low ---> high)

Then, plot where people or groups fall:

- **Top right:** High influence, high support ---> your key allies.
- **Top left:** High influence, low support ---> potential blockers to watch or engage.
- **Bottom right:** Low influence, high support ---> mobilizers who can build public pressure.
- **Bottom left:** Low influence, low support ---> monitor, but focus energy elsewhere.



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Step 5: Spot Leverage Points

Look for leverage points, or people or relationships that could move your target. Ask:

- Who could persuade them?
- Who do they trust or meet with often?
- Who shares values or goals that overlap with your issue?

EXAMPLE

A legislator might be persuaded by hearing from small business owners who support paid leave or from constituents affected by the lack of reproductive health care access. These are your strategic entry points where outreach can shift power.

Step 6: Build Your Strategy

Now turn your map into action. Use what you've learned to decide:

- **Who to contact first:** allies who can help build credibility.
- **What message will resonate:** align your values with theirs.
- **What tactics to use:** meetings, stories, letters, media outreach, or public testimony.
- **Who to mobilize:** community members, partner organizations, or coalitions.

EXAMPLE

- **Meet with supportive lawmakers to co-sponsor your bill.**
- **Organize parent advocates to contact committee members.**
- **Publish an op-ed highlighting local economic impact.**
- **Keep your strategy rooted in relationships — not just tasks.**

Step 7: Take Action and Revisit

A Power Map isn't static. Update it as the political or social landscape changes.

- Did you move anyone's position?
- Did new allies or opponents emerge?
- Where do you still have gaps?

Continue adjusting and re-mapping as your campaign develops. Power shifts, so your strategy should, too.