The Path to Power: Best Practices in Power Mapping

This Learning & Progress report prepared by analyst Gail Francis 1/18/2011

In an earlier report, I recommended that RE-AMP members not only assess what moves incoming legislators, but also take a fresh look at existing ones. This report will explore some of the systems commonly used to find the right ways to target decision makers. Such systems go by a variety of names but are sometimes called “power mapping,” and that is the term I will use in this document. Some readers may have a different understanding of the term than the one I use here.

In this report I summarize samples that can be downloaded from the Commons, then discuss ways to ramp up your power mapping prowess. These findings are primarily derived from roughly twenty interviews with people across the RE-AMP network (and some outside the network) who have experience with power mapping.

**Samples Available to the RE-AMP Network**

Below is a summary of eleven different power mapping systems. Seven are from RE-AMP members and four are from other movements. When the source is a RE-AMP organization, I have provided the name of the appropriate contact. Note that in some cases I have converted the documents to pdf format to ensure readability, but if you would like the original word or power point document to make a template of your own, you may contact me. *Please do not circulate any of these samples beyond the RE-AMP network.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Particularly Good for:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dakota Rural Action (Frank James)</td>
<td>Grid of influence.</td>
<td>Identifying the key allies and opposition that require most attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan Environmental Council (David Gard)</td>
<td>Concentric circles of influence.</td>
<td>Easy to see inner circle of decision maker without getting bogged down in multitude of possibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota Environmental Partnership (Patience Caso)</td>
<td>Spreadsheet showing range of levers that might be applied to target.</td>
<td>Matching target to capacity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoveOn.Org</td>
<td>Relational map template (similar to Ohio Citizen Action, below).</td>
<td>Ability to see a multitude of factors that weigh on target.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
National Wildlife Federation (Danielle Korpalski)  Campaign plan based on prior power mapping.  Deep knowledge of what moves targets.

Ohio Citizens Action (Rachael Belz)  Relational map.  Analysis of decision-maker’s vulnerability.


Take Action Minnesota  Template for conducting face-to-face research.  Identifying solutions and developing relationships needed to win.

The Change Agency  Grid template (similar to Dakota Rural Action, but without the ability to update via excel as you go along).  Identifying the key allies and opposition that require most attention.


What Makes It Work?

In the course of gathering this material, I heard some great stories about how power mapping enabled advocates to cut through the clutter and focus on what mattered. For example, in South Dakota, advocates kept running up against the same opponent in their work to pass a bill to impede the tar sands pipeline. “So,” as Dakota Rural Action’s Frank James explains, “we used our power mapping and really dug into him to find out what moves him. We did some good old fashioned organizing. It wasn’t one thing that moved him. We found a lot of levers and worked them all. By the end, he was our biggest supporter. A bill that every other year had died in committee, fell only one vote short of the super majority it needed to pass.”

In a more urban setting, the North Star Chapter of the Sierra Club won an important victory by getting Excel Energy to agree to a plan that would significantly cut pollution. “But then we had to pass that at the PUC [Public Utility Commission],” says Michelle Rosier. “We power-mapped each commissioner. You can’t lobby commissioners directly, so influence has to come through testimony and such. We know that we want to pack the hearing room, but power mapping helped us know who to pack it with.” Advocates found the right people to attend and speak, and the plan was approved.

In general, what makes advances like this possible? According to the advocates I spoke with, there are a few things that can make your power mapping efforts more likely to produce a good result.

✓ Research
✓ Convene
✓ Be discerning
✓ Get down to the right level of detail
Set clear expectations for follow up
Tie up loose ends

**Research:** Because power mapping involves gaining insight that you don’t currently have, the biggest input into your power map usually involves research into your target. Often people assume that such research can be done entirely online or pulling from institutional knowledge, but if you have a target that you really need to move, it is worth it to spend time in human conversation with anyone who can provide insight. Call up contacts who can assist you, or conduct cold calls with pertinent people (see the samples from Take Action MN or Wisconsin LCV for good templates). Additionally, if your target is the head of the company instead of (or as well as) a legislator, go to the physical library to research relevant trade publications; talk to the librarian about what other kinds of info you can get about the firm. Look at their press statements and SEC filings.

**Convene:** Get others to help you. Bring in as many allies as you can to get the best possible picture of potential inroads. And note that staff or members who you may not think of as organizers have deep roots in the community too. If you can, bring them in to the exercise. Put everything up on butcher paper or some other visual aid so that everyone can see and agree on what’s being generated. (See MEP’s memo for an example of how to get diverse, trusted viewpoints. See OCA’s web diagram, MEC’s concentric circles, or DRA’s grid for an example of how your results might look.)

**Be discerning:** Sometimes we know a player is important to our target and we add their name to our map, but we don’t have great information about them. The result is that we have just introduced dubious information into our process. One way to deal with this is to make that information visually smaller or otherwise clearly mark that it needs to be fleshed out. Conversely, you can make your best information larger and more prominent. If you are using a grid, you can enter the name as a place holder on the axis, but leave the value blank.

**Get down to the right level of detail:** The power mapping process itself can yield a fascinating look at the target and the universe of our knowledge. It can be all too easy to get sucked into listing every possible connection we could conceivably have to the target. But experienced power mappers caution against getting too deep in the weeds. How do you know when you have the right level of detail? *When the participants have a clear map to the target, using their existing or realistically projected capacity.* Stopping the exercise too soon may leave things too general or just belabor the obvious. Carrying the exercise too far, however, can simply muddy the waters or waste energy.

**Set clear expectations for follow up:** We don’t have unlimited resources to pursue every possible angle, and we can’t always call upon every contact we have. When looking at the map to the target, *be sure it is grounded in what you can achieve.* There is literally no point to doing a power mapping exercise if there is no agreement among participants to execute a plan. (See MEP’s inclusion of grassroots/grasstops capacity into power mapping. See NWF’s campaign plan that utilized what they learned in power mapping.)

**Tie up loose ends:** At some point you will probably do another power map for another target. Over time, you might do quite a few. What are the names that keep coming up as loose ends—people or groups that can influence a lot of our targets, but that are unreachable by us? If we could find some way to make a connection with those entities, we could influence many different campaigns. You may want to power map some of these loose ends as targets themselves if they could really help you move the ball down the court. (See Fresh Energy’s in-depth look at a senator from a state we’ve had a hard time bringing on board for clean energy policies.)
Use Your Network

Just as online research doesn’t compare with human interaction to gain insight about your target, this report cannot compare with the expertise of actual humans within the RE-AMP network. Please feel free to contact me or any of the contacts referenced in this report for more information about how you can make power mapping work for you. I can be reached at (715) 945-2164 or ampanalyst@gmail.com.