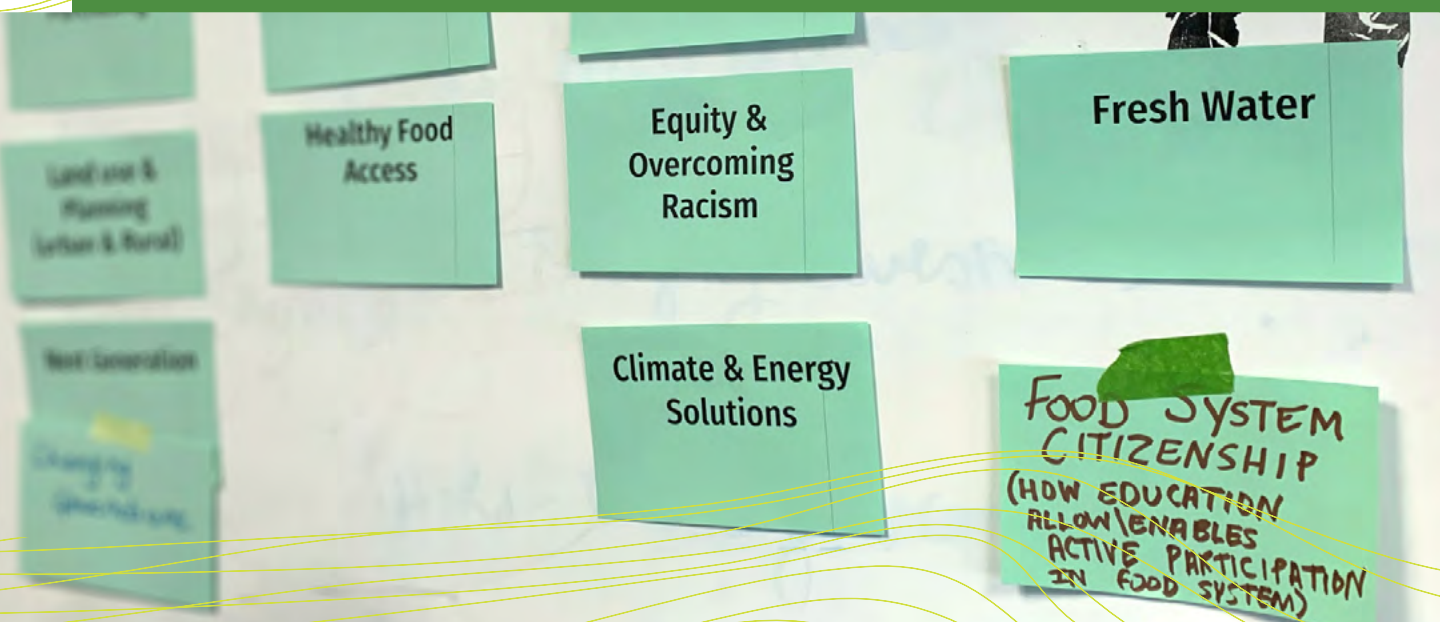


Methodology for Power Mapping

FOR YOUR COMMUNITY'S
FOOD SYSTEM



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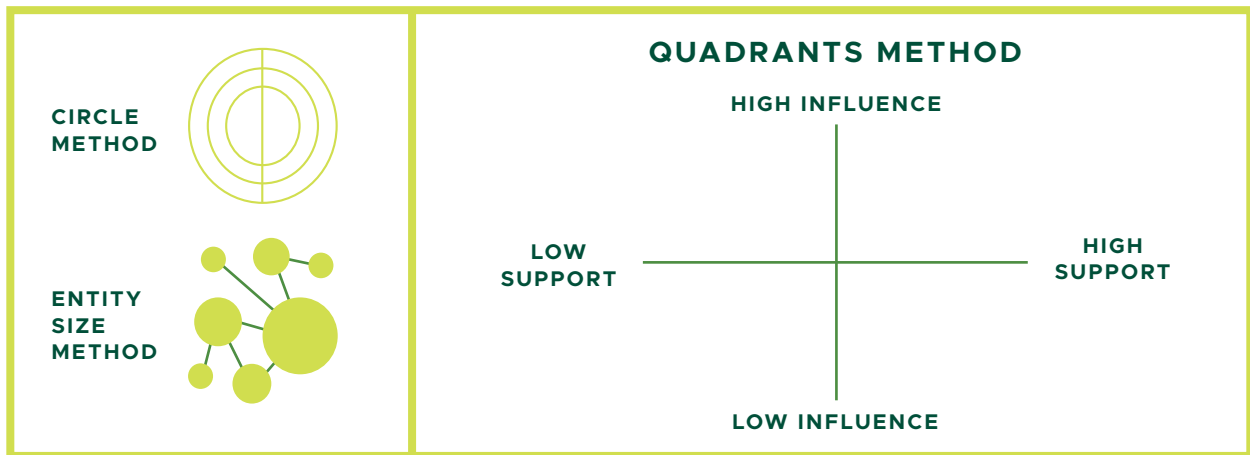
Center for
Regional Food Systems

What is power mapping, and why is it helpful?

Power mapping is a qualitative strategic exercise that helps to determine the power dynamics and relationships within a system or community. By examining a targeted issue or goal, this process identifies and categorizes the power relationships of potential stakeholders and their influence.

Several different methods exist for doing the exercise and visually presenting the information, including circle sizes, entity sizes, and an axis with quadrants. This document will focus on the axis using the quadrant method.

Traditionally, when utilizing the axis with the quadrants method, the horizontal x-axis has low & high support, while the vertical y-axis shows least to most influential. Other axis titles may include: support vs. oppose, interest vs. power. An example is shown below:



UNDERSTANDING POWER

For community-driven initiatives, power is defined as *“the ability or capacity to achieve a collectively agreed upon goal.”*¹

Before conducting the power-mapping exercise, group leaders and the facilitator should prompt participants to discuss power dynamics to better understand their perspectives and the factors involved. Below are a couple of areas to highlight. To go deeper, [take a look at the Sources](#) section at the end of this document

Influence and Control:

Power dynamics involve how individuals or groups influence decisions, behaviors, or outcomes. This can be through formal authority, knowledge, social status, or other means. Power relationships in our society are unequal, and this is one of the primary reasons for the conditions of oppression and other problems our communities face. So we must develop strategies that address this by creating a systematic way of understanding power.

¹ [SCOPE, 2008](#)

Differing Analyses:

Within the group, you may have different perspectives about the interests and decision-making power of a person or organization. Additionally, participants may have differing definitions of power and the relevance of stakeholders mapped, or folks might define decision-making power differently. Discussing and ensuring that this is not creating wedges in your group can be helpful. Keep in mind what our goal is and why we are doing this specific power mapping.

FACTORS THAT CAN INFLUENCE POWER:

- legal power/positions and authority
- financial resources
- demonstrated influence (demonstrated success in moving their agenda)
- institutional positions and ability to influence (committees, boards, offices)
- relationships / allies (political, organizational, social)
- expertise (access to information, research, etc.)
- organizational size

Preparing for Power Mapping

Before conducting the exercise, the facilitator leading the exercise and the participants should complete pre-work. This will ensure that the session has all the information needed to be efficient and effective.

GOALS

It is important for the group conducting this exercise to determine the group's goal(s). Consider whether what you learn from power mapping is part of a bigger goal (such as a specific policy change) or a more broad goal (such as understanding who might join your food council). It is important to understand how the exercise's outcomes will determine your next steps. The following questions may help you define your aims.

Do we want power mapping to help us:

- determine future collaborators or partners?
- understand who controls access to specific resources in our community?
- prepare how to respond to challenges or barriers we may encounter?
- understand which entities may have influence on your specific policy or advocacy goals?

DETERMINE THE DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

Factors to consider when determining the when and where:

- You will need 2-4 hours, depending on the group size.
- A larger group requires more time for discussion.
- Your location will need to have enough wall or window space to hang large flip chart paper.

RESEARCH

Depending on your goals, it may be important to conduct some in-depth research about your community ahead of gathering. Dividing this research task among the participants may help everyone learn more about the community and ease the heavy lifting.

Create a shared document or spreadsheet (such as Google Sheets) where participants can collaborate to add the following information:

Program/Entity Name	Address (or City)	Primary Contact Name	Primary Contact Email	Connection Notes

Ideally, the gathered research will be completed at least 2-3 business days before the session so that the facilitator or participating team lead can have a few printed copies of the document to share with the participants during the exercise. Also, suggest that participants bring laptops to use during the session, if available.

If you determine that in-depth research is not needed prior to the mapping, determine how much time would be helpful to add to the session's duration so that there is still enough time to be thorough.

Sharing a set of categories may help you divide up the research and inspire the participants during the mapping session.

Possible categories for the power mapping exercise:

- Emergency Food and Food Access Organizations (food banks, food pantries, Meals On Wheels)
- Environmental Justice and Stewardship Groups
- Faith-Based Food Initiatives
- Farmers' Markets, Food Hubs, Farm Stops
- Farms (rural, urban, periurban)
- Food Distribution Businesses
- Food Processing, Production, and Manufacturing
- Foundations and Funders
- Grocery Stores Retailers
- Health Department
- Higher Education (colleges and universities)
- Hospitals and Health Clinics
- Landscaping, Composting Services
- Locally Owned Restaurants and Cafes
- Maternal and Child Health Organizations
- Nursing Homes and Long-term Care Facilities
- Nutrition Services and Education Organizations
- Prisons, Correctional, and Rehabilitation Facilities
- Research, Resource, and Support Organizations
- Schools, Intermediate School Districts, and Early Care and Education Sites
- Waste Removal and Recycling Services

GROUP NORMS:

Group norms are the spoken or unspoken rules that guide how team members interact, collaborate effectively, and work efficiently. Be sure to review group norms with your group and ask for clarification and understanding. The facilitator should ask the participants for changes or additional norms to add. Below are some examples to use during the session.

- ❑ Create the expectation that the group should refer back to these norms during the discussion.
- ❑ Respect each other's point of view. We are all here to achieve the same goal. Ground yourself in that.
- ❑ Respect the process—we may not finish everything today, but this will be a part of the bigger plan to build on.
- ❑ Stay on task and on topic. It can be easy to get too involved in topics like this or other things that come to mind when participating in the activity. If something comes to mind but doesn't specifically relate to our goals and activity today, put it on flip chart paper and set it to the side. It is called the "parking lot." That way, we don't forget the thought without distracting us from the day's goals.
- ❑ Please recognize that part of a facilitator's role is to help the discussion flow effectively and efficiently. There may be moments when the facilitator asks you to step back or up when contributing to the discussion so that we can reach the day's goals.

Power Mapping Exercise Instructions

Step 1: Write the goal(s) of the power mapping exercise on a large paper where everyone can see. Put the predetermined categories on separate sticky notes.

Session Materials: Flip chart paper, dot stickers, flip chart markers, post-it notes/sticky notes, pens. If conducting the exercise virtually, you can utilize online collaboration tools like [Padlet](#), [Zoom Whiteboards](#), [Mentimeter](#), [dotstorming](#) or [Miro](#).

Step 2: Randomly select a category, then discuss its placement on the axis with the group. Allow for some discussion where there is disagreement and seek group agreement on the placement. The group agreement should come with the understanding that this is simply an exercise to get a general understanding, and further nuance can be explored after the prioritization step. Repeat the process with each category.

Step 3: By writing directly on the flip chart paper or sticky notes, name the entities within categories that should meet the goal. Prioritize those it makes the most sense to involve, whether or not they are currently engaged. If you are using online collaboration tools, consider using a voting function to allow participants to mark the categories they prioritize.

CONSIDER WHERE THE CATEGORIES LANDED IN THE MATRIX:



Sample Working Agenda

This example agenda is for a 3.5-hour session (including set up, working lunch, and clean up) 11am - 2:30pm.

When	Who (lead)	What
11 a.m.	Facilitator	Arrive at the location Set up
11:30 a.m.	Lead Team Member Facilitator	Welcome Kick-off <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Introductions (name, pronouns, role/background, what area of the service are you are from) — Review the agenda for the session — Group norms — Goals for today
12 p.m.	Facilitator	Discussions on power dynamics
12:20 p.m.	Facilitator	Power Mapping Activity Overview of activity and aligning on outcome
12:30 p.m.	Lead Team Member	Break for getting food for working lunch
12:45 p.m.	Facilitator	Resume exercise
2 p.m.	Facilitator	Closing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Next steps — Closing thoughts? — Clean up
2:30 p.m.		Session ends

SOURCES

[All About Power](#) | Srilatha Batliwala

[Create Group Norms for Effective Teams w/ Examples \[2025\]](#) | Asana

[How to Use Power Mapping in Action Research](#) | Dr. Dee

[Power Analysis](#) | Othering & Belonging Institute

[Power Mapping: What It Is & How to Use It](#) | Harvard Business School

This resource was created as part of the Michigan State University Michigan Local Food Council Network Equitable Community Food Assessment Learning Cohort with support from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

VISION

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

MISSION

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

ABOUT

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

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