



Mapping Connections: A Tool for Forming a Network

Overview: People interested and involved in promoting positive social change—through service, advocacy, and other vehicles—need to think about the relationships that exist within the spheres in which they work. Social change agents need tools to access resources and to put her/his ideas into action. This workshop gives participants a framework and a set of tools to tap into the connections that will make things happen. It puts these ideas and tools into action using a specific group-determined problem.

Category: Problem-solving and leadership development; relationship building; civic engagement

Level: Intermediate to advanced level; a good follow-up to “Building a Personal Network,” also found in the C.O.O.L.-Idealist Civic Engagement Curriculum

Type: Structured workshop process

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- This workshop presents participants with a specific process for mapping out connections between and among people, organizations, and institutions in a given context
- This process helps to teach participants the value of connections and personal relationships as an important dynamic in social organizing
- Participants will have the opportunity to tackle a key problem identified by the group using the mapping process

Materials:

- Copies of “Find Me!” handouts
- Copies of “Steps to Mapping Connections” handouts for all participants
- Index cards or post-its
- Pens/pencils for all participants

How to Prepare:

Prepare yourself to facilitate by reviewing the guide and becoming comfortable with the facilitation process, especially through part two when you must present the steps for mapping.

You should create a visual example as a large flip chart or hand out using relationships and organizations in your immediate context.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

There are three parts to this one-hour workshop. You can modify them if necessary (e.g., eliminate or change the warm up, break the workshop into two parts to fit a brief weekly meeting structure, etc.):

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Warm-Up Activity | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 2. Strategy for Mapping Connections | suggested time 40 minutes |
| 3. Wrap-Up and Next Steps | suggested time 10 minutes |
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1 Warm-Up Activity

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Introduce yourself (very briefly), including your experience in mapping communities and any other skills or knowledge relevant to this workshop. If you'd like, you can have everyone briefly go around the room and give their name and another brief but interesting fact about themselves (hometown, major, favorite 80s TV show, etc.). Then proceed to the warm-up activity.

This exercise is called "Find Me!" and is intended to get people thinking about connections. Participants will each be given a list of items and asked to find people who fit the descriptions (a blank list can be found at the end of this guide). For example, the items may say "I can use woodworking tools," "I like to give contributions to good causes," "I'm good at working with children," or "I am good at supporting others during hard times." Each participant will be asked to find another person that fits this description. When a person is found they will initial the sheet. Each participant can sign her/his name on multiple statements, but can only sign a sheet once.

Take about seven minutes to do the activity. (You'll have to rein people in – they can get competitive!) Ask the group:

- Who completed their sheet (i.e. got all the statements signed)?
- Who could sign the most statements?
- Give an example of something useful you learned that could help you out right away. For example, you might have found someone who has a skill related to a project with which you're currently involved.
- Give an example of something you don't think is very relevant to your current needs and priorities.
- Might this change sometime in the future?

Conclusion: Everyone has something to contribute. Look at all the resources in this room. Some contributions may be more relevant or timely than others, but they can all be important (and produce change over time).

2 Strategy for Mapping Connections

Suggested time: 40 minutes

In this section, demonstrate the framework and concept of mapping connections. Review the definition of mapping that this workshop utilizes:

Mapping connections is a framework for problem-solving through relationship-building. This framework is based on the assumption that networks of relationships (between and among individuals, organizations, institutions, etc.) are critical resources, and that stronger networks yield stronger and more creative solutions.

Identify and follow the steps listed below. You may want to have them written on newsprint and posted so that all participants can see them.

Step 1: Map the problem

You can map using a problem, person, or institution at the center of the map. You may end up with several overlapping maps that get you closer and closer to your end goal. For the purpose of this exercise we will start with the most general map – mapping a problem.

Ask the group to come up with a particular problem or issue for their group (every group should be able to think of at least one problem; encourage them to think about issues they are currently facing). Provide a few examples like, “We need to secure a site for the spring conference,” “We need to get funding for our Alternative Spring Break program,” “We need to enhance the training component of our America Reads initiative, or “We need to find a faculty advisor for our ‘learning in the community’ course.” Write the problem in the middle of the newsprint.

Step 2: Map major institutions

Identify key decision-making institutions or associations that are related to that problem. Write these names on the newsprint in a ring around the problem.

Using the example of *finding the faculty advisor for learning in the community course*, participants may shout out things like:

- Public service center
- Religious life department
- Innovative courses program
- Dean of students
- College president
- Public policy department
- Business school

As they suggest things, write these names up in a circular (free-form) fashion around the center circle in which the “problem” is written.

Step 3: Map individuals associated with the institutions

Put the names of two to three individuals who are associated with each of those institutions in the second ring (moving out concentrically) around the problem. These can be both people you do and do not know.

For the example above (of course, during the facilitation, it won't line up so neatly):

- Mary Jo Peat, Director
- Chaplain Thomas
- That graduate student who TA's my education course
- Dean Bosch
- President Torres and that Vice President who really loves service
- Professor Brown, who's really into social justice issues
- That guy Harold Maud who founded the businesses for social responsibility chapter

Of course, there may be more than one person associated with each of the institutions, or there may be some institutions where people don't know the names. Here you can note a question like, "Who is the Dean?"

Step 4: Map all other associations with these individuals

Ask participants to think about people they know connected to these key individuals. The purpose of this is to help identify easier ways to access the individuals or institutions that could help solve the problem, by tapping into existing relationships between people. Note here any relationships and information that you or other members in the group have with the people listed. Encourage people to be creative in thinking about how they may be connected to the people brainstormed.

Again, drawing on the example above:

- Mary Jo's my mentor - Bob
- I have a course with Chaplain Thomas - Geraldine
- I can talk to my TA - Sanjeev
- I don't know Dean Bosch, but my mom and his wife are in a book club together - Maria
- Dean Bosch did a training in my dorm, and our group still works with him - Bob
- My roommate Brandy is the newspaper editor and has met with President Torres
- Professor Brown's daughter is in my sorority - Johnette
- Professor Brown is going to be my thesis advisor - Sanjeev
- Harold is going to be speaking at the Black Student Union event this month - Rick

Also, look over the list on the handout of areas to consider while mapping connections. This information should go in the third ring around the problem.

Step 5: Determine relational power lines

Next, step back and conceptually review the networks that the group has mapped out, drawing lines to connect people and institutions that relate to each other. Some people will have many connections while others may not have any.

In the example above, there would be many lines. In practice, depending on the scale or history of the "problem," it may be more or less difficult to identify institutions, people, and relationships that connect them. This step helps the group to identify what may be called the "centerpieces" within a given network. These people and/or institutions help connect many others within your network and are essential for building cohesive connections.

Step 6: Target priority relationships

The next step is to analyze the relationships and connections and make some decisions about who to contact in order to most effectively solve the named problem.

One way to do this is to circle the few people that have the most relational connection lines drawn to them (the “centerpieces”). Consider attempting to involve these people through your group’s current relationships. In the example above, the group might say, “Dean Bosch seems to be critical in this picture, and both Maria and Bob have a way to connect with him.” If no one in the group seems to be somewhat directly connected to a centerpiece person, then you may need to go another step deeper and directly create another map around each of these centerpiece people.

Another thing to consider may be a person or institution in the map that doesn’t necessarily have many different relational lines running to him/her/it, but nonetheless has a few critical ones and seems very influential. If you can identify a priority person/institution for which there isn’t a clear relationship, then you might want to encourage the group to find out more about this person/institution.

Step 7: Make a plan

Based on the “centerpieces” that emerge through steps 5 and 6, along with the decisions made by the group, create some action steps for what to do next. Determine the best approaches to accessing these individuals and institutions through relationships and decide who will be responsible for what and give deadlines for each step.

These can be fairly straightforward. Taking the example above, the group could decide:

Maria is going to talk to her mom about Dean Bosch and his wife and what may be good ways to obtain their support.

Bob is going to ask Mary Jo to help him request a meeting with Dean Bosch to seek his support for the course, perhaps through the public service center.

Sanjeev is going to talk to Professor Brown about good faculty members with whom to talk.
Rick is going to meet Harold Maud to scout out people at the business school.

3 Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Suggested time: 10 minutes

You can also do a brief evaluation of the workshop itself, using a simple tool like Plus/Delta. A Plus/Delta session is a chance for participants to give positive feedback on and ways to improve the preceding activities and information. As the facilitator, you should divide a piece of flipchart paper vertically and list “Pluses” on the left and “Deltas” on the right. Ask participants to give their impressions of things that really resonated with them and excited them so far as the pluses, and things that they were unclear about or that they would have changed as the Deltas.

Feedback for both sections can be taken simultaneously, rather than doing one first and then the other. Note both the Pluses and the Deltas for the rest of the workshop, as well as subsequent training events.

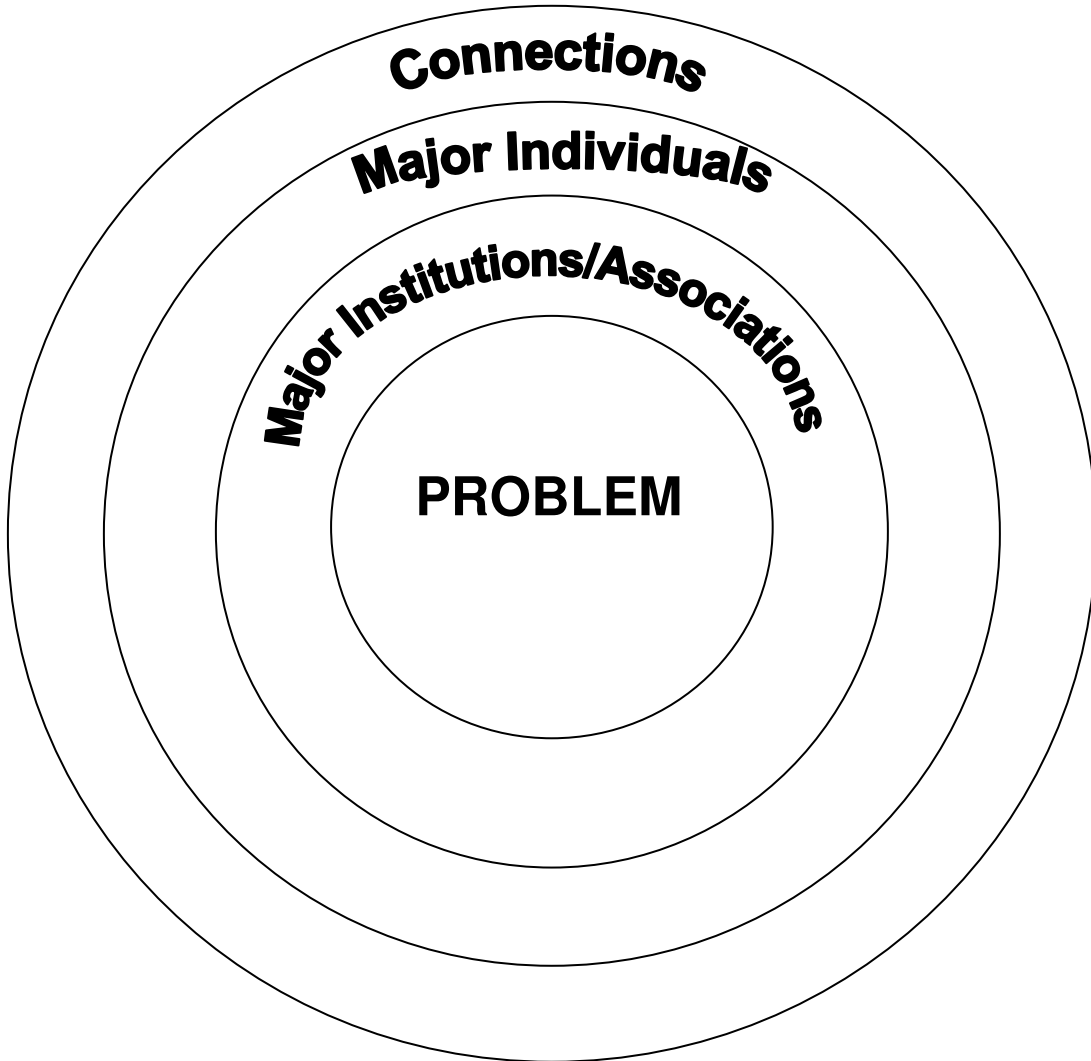
Depending on the time available and the needs of the participants, you may want to try any of the following as a way to move forward or close this workshop (this will, of course, take longer than 10 minutes!):

- **Review the process again, using another example (perhaps more complicated):** It often helps to repeat a process, perhaps with a different facilitator or issue. You could also break the larger group into smaller groups to repeat the process (for example in an extended workshop at a retreat or leadership training event).
- **Brainstorm potential applications:** This process is useful for many things and is all about being resourceful. To illustrate this point, have the group brainstorm ways that this process could work for other things. Record on newsprint.
- **Have each person (if it's a group that doesn't work as a team) name one thing he/she can use the mapping process for and follow up in an upcoming meeting:** If you are a student or administrator doing this training, perhaps in the context of your ongoing work with the group, you may want to have individuals/groups actually try the process on their own and share reports at an upcoming meeting.

Warm Up Activity: Find Me!

- * I know how to use woodworking tools and other power tools. *
- * I enjoy giving small donations to causes I believe in. *
- * I am good at supporting people in times of crisis. *
- * I know how to speak Spanish very well or fluently. *
- * I like leading groups in outdoor activities--biking, hiking, camping, etc. *
- * I know a lot about health and fitness. *
- * I am good at working with children and youth. *
- * I like to plan things. *
- * I like to cook for others. *
- * I know a lot about music and bands. *
- * I keep very current with the local, national, and international happenings. *
- * I am a good writer. *
- * I can play a musical instrument and/or sing well. *

**Mapping Connections
(For Review by Facilitator)**



Steps to Mapping Connections

Step 1: Map the problem

Map around a problem, person, or institution at the center of the map. Identify a particular problem or issue.

Step 2: Map major institutions

Identify key decision-making institutions or associations that are related to that problem. Write these names on the newsprint in a ring around the problem.

Step 3: Map individuals associated with the institutions

Put the names of two to three individuals who are associated with each of those institutions in the second ring (moving out concentrically) around the problem. These can be people you do or do not know.

Step 4: Map all other associations with these individuals

Think about people you know who are connected to these key individuals. This will help identify easier ways to access the individuals or institutions that could help solve the problem, by tapping into existing relationships between people. At this step, you can note any members of the group's relationships with, and/or information about, the people listed.

Step 5: Determine relational power lines

Step back and conceptually review the networks that the group has mapped out, drawing lines connecting people and institutions that have relations to each other. Some people will have many connections, while others may not have any. Those people and/or institutions with many connections are known as "centerpieces" and are very important to building relationships within your community.

Step 6: Target priority relationships

Analyze the relationships and connections and make decisions. One way to do this is to circle the few people who have the most relational lines drawn to them.

Also take into account a person or institution in the map that doesn't necessarily have many different relational lines running to him/her/it but nonetheless has a few critical ones and is influential.

Step 7: Make a plan

Create some action steps to which people can commit after the session ends.