

Power Analysis Toolkit for Water Governance

Building Community Power for Water Justice

Overview

This toolkit provides systematic methods for analyzing power relationships in water governance, building coalitions, and developing strategies that center community voices while advancing water justice. Designed for community organizers, water advocates, and grassroots leaders working to transform water systems from extraction to regeneration.

Core Purpose: Map who has power over water decisions, identify opportunities for building community influence, and develop strategic approaches for advancing water justice through collective action.

Step 1: Stakeholder Identification and Mapping

Primary Stakeholders (Direct Decision-Makers)

Government Officials:

- Mayor, city council members, county commissioners
- Water utility managers and board members
- Public health officials and environmental regulators
- State legislators and agency directors

Corporate Leaders:

- Private water company executives and board members
- Industrial water users and polluters
- Developers and real estate interests
- Financial institutions funding water projects

Mapping Questions:

- Who has the authority to make the final decision on your issue?
- What is their current position (supportive, neutral, opposed)?
- What influences their decision-making (politics, economics, relationships)?
- What are their sources of pressure and support?

Secondary Stakeholders (Influencers)

Community Leaders:

- Religious leaders, educators, business owners
- Traditional authorities and cultural leaders
- Youth organizers and women's group leaders
- Environmental and social justice advocates

Technical and Professional Networks:

- Engineers, lawyers, public health experts
- Academic researchers and policy analysts
- Labor union leaders and worker representatives
- Media personalities and journalists

Organizations and Institutions:

- Environmental and social justice organizations
- Professional associations and trade groups
- Educational institutions and healthcare systems
- Faith communities and cultural organizations

Grassroots Constituencies (Affected Communities)

Directly Affected Groups:

- Communities without safe water access
- Residents facing high water bills or shutoffs
- Workers in water-related industries
- Indigenous peoples and traditional water stewards

Broader Community Interests:

- Parents concerned about school water quality
- Small businesses affected by water costs
- Recreational water users and environmental enthusiasts
- Public health advocates and healthcare workers



Step 2: Power and Influence Assessment

Power Mapping Grid

Create a visual map using two axes:

- **Vertical Axis:** Level of Influence (High to Low)
- **Horizontal Axis:** Position on Issue (Strongly Opposed to Strongly Supportive)

Quadrant Analysis:

High Influence + Supportive (Champions):

- Your strongest allies with significant power
- Ask them to publicly advocate and use their influence
- Connect them with other supporters to amplify impact
- Support their leadership and provide resources

High Influence + Neutral (Persuadables):

- Key targets for conversion efforts
- Research their interests, values, and pressure points

- Develop tailored approaches based on their motivations
- Build relationships before making direct asks

High Influence + Opposed (Opponents):

- May need to be neutralized or worked around
- Understand their opposition sources and motivations
- Look for common ground or ways to reduce their influence
- Prepare counter-strategies and alternative pathways

Low Influence + Supportive (Base Building):

- Your grassroots base for organizing and mobilization
- Organize them for collective action and voice
- Build their capacity and leadership skills
- Connect them with higher-influence allies

Influence Network Analysis

Relationship Mapping:

- Draw lines between stakeholders who have relationships
- Identify clusters of connected allies and opponents
- Find bridges between different groups or communities
- Discover unexpected connections and influence pathways

Influence Sources:

- **Formal Authority:** Legal/official decision-making power
- **Resource Control:** Money, information, or infrastructure access
- **Expertise:** Technical knowledge or professional credibility
- **Relationships:** Personal connections and trust networks
- **Moral Authority:** Credibility on values and community respect
- **Mobilization Capacity:** Ability to organize people for action



Step 3: Coalition Building Strategy

Alliance Development Framework

Natural Allies (Shared values and interests):

- Environmental justice organizations
- Public health advocates and healthcare workers
- Religious communities with social justice missions
- Labor unions representing water workers
- Indigenous rights organizations and traditional leaders

Strategic Allies (Different motivations, overlapping interests):

- Fiscal conservatives concerned about public spending
- Business groups affected by water costs or regulations
- Suburban residents concerned about water quality
- Emergency preparedness and public safety advocates

Potential Allies (Require education and relationship-building):

- Professional associations (engineers, planners, lawyers)
- Educational institutions and research organizations
- Arts and cultural organizations with community connections
- Sports and recreation groups using water facilities

Coalition Roles and Contributions

Leadership Roles:

- **Community Organizations:** Provide grassroots base and affected community voice
- **Technical Organizations:** Offer expertise and credibility
- **Advocacy Organizations:** Contribute policy expertise and lobbying capacity
- **Cultural Organizations:** Bring moral authority and broad community representation

Resource Contributions:

- **Funding:** Membership fees, fundraising capacity, foundation grants
- **Expertise:** Legal, technical, policy, and organizing knowledge
- **Networks:** Relationships with decision-makers, media, and other organizations
- **Mobilization:** Ability to turn out members for actions and events

Communication Strategy:

- **Unified Messaging:** Core messages that all coalition members can support
- **Diverse Voices:** Different messengers for different audiences
- **Cultural Competency:** Messages adapted for diverse communities
- **Media Coordination:** Shared media strategy and spokesperson protocols

Step 4: Strategy Development

Theory of Change Mapping

Problem Analysis:

- Root causes of water injustice in your community
- System barriers preventing community control over water
- Key decision points and leverage opportunities
- Resources and capacity available for change

Change Strategy:

- **Short-term wins:** Immediate improvements that build momentum
- **Medium-term goals:** Policy changes and system reforms
- **Long-term vision:** Transformative change toward water justice
- **Pathway connections:** How short-term wins lead to long-term transformation

Tactical Selection Matrix

Inside Strategies (Working within existing systems):

- **Policy Advocacy:** Lobbying, testimony, policy research and proposals
- **Electoral Engagement:** Candidate forums, voter education, campaign support
- **Regulatory Participation:** Public comment, hearings, regulatory advocacy
- **Collaborative Planning:** Multi-stakeholder processes and negotiations

Outside Strategies (Building pressure from external organizing):

- **Public Education:** Community forums, media campaigns, educational events
- **Direct Action:** Protests, demonstrations, civil disobedience
- **Community Organizing:** Door-to-door, base building, leadership development
- **Economic Pressure:** Boycotts, divestment, shareholder actions

Cultural Strategies (Changing hearts and minds):

- **Storytelling:** Personal narratives, community testimony, cultural expression
- **Arts and Culture:** Music, visual arts, theater, cultural events
- **Spiritual/Faith:** Religious education, moral witness, ceremony
- **Media and Communications:** Social media, traditional media, alternative media

Resistance Management

Opposition Research:

- Understand opponents' arguments, funding sources, and strategies
- Identify weaknesses and contradictions in their positions
- Anticipate their likely responses to your actions
- Develop counter-narratives and rapid response plans

Conflict Transformation:

- **De-escalation:** When to step back from confrontation
- **Negotiation:** Finding common ground and mutually beneficial solutions
- **Pressure Escalation:** When and how to increase pressure strategically
- **Long-term Relationship Building:** Maintaining possibility for future collaboration



Step 5: Implementation and Evaluation

Action Planning Worksheet

Target Analysis:

- **Primary Target:** Who has the power to give you what you want?
- **Secondary Targets:** Who influences the primary target?
- **Decision Timeline:** When will the decision be made?
- **Decision Process:** How will the decision be made and who's involved?

Strategy Selection:

- **Core Message:** What do you want them to do and why?
- **Messenger Strategy:** Who should deliver the message?
- **Method Selection:** How will you deliver the message (meeting, petition, demonstration)?
- **Timing:** When will you take action for maximum impact?

Resource Requirements:

- **People:** How many people do you need and in what roles?
- **Funding:** What will the action cost and where will money come from?
- **Materials:** What equipment, supplies, or resources are needed?
- **Logistics:** What planning and coordination is required?

Power Shift Indicators

Relationship Changes:

- New allies joining your coalition or cause
- Opponents becoming neutral or reducing opposition
- Increased access to decision-makers and forums
- Enhanced credibility and respect in community

Policy and Practice Changes:

- Policy proposals incorporating your priorities

- New funding allocated to community-controlled water projects
- Improved government responsiveness to community concerns
- Corporate behavior changes in response to pressure

Organizational Development:

- Increased membership and volunteer engagement
- Enhanced leadership development and community capacity
- Improved organizational sustainability and resources
- Stronger partnerships and network relationships

Community Empowerment:

- Greater community understanding of water issues and rights
- Increased community engagement in water governance
- Development of local leaders and organizing capacity
- Enhanced community agency and self-determination



Practical Tools and Templates

Stakeholder Mapping Template

Instructions: List stakeholders in each category and assess their position and influence

Stakeholder Name	Type	Position (1-5)*	Influence (1-5)**	Key Interests	Pressure Points

*Position: 1=Strongly Opposed, 2=Opposed, 3=Neutral, 4=Supportive, 5=Strongly Supportive

**Influence: 1=Very Low, 2=Low, 3=Moderate, 4=High, 5=Very High

Coalition Partner Assessment

Instructions: Evaluate potential coalition partners across multiple dimensions

Organization	Mission Alignment	Resource Capacity	Network Reach	Reliability	Contribution Potential

Assessment Questions:

- Mission Alignment: Do their values and goals align with water justice?
- Resource Capacity: What resources (money, staff, expertise) can they contribute?
- Network Reach: What communities and decision-makers do they have relationships with?
- Reliability: Have they been consistent partners in past collaborations?
- Contribution Potential: What unique value would they add to the coalition?

Action Planning Matrix

Goal: [Specific, measurable outcome you want to achieve]

Target: [Primary decision-maker who can give you what you want]

Action Step	Timeline	Responsible Party	Resources Needed	Success Indicators

Relationship Building Tracker

Instructions: Track your relationship-building efforts with key stakeholders

Stakeholder	Current Relationship	Last Contact	Next Step	Contact Method	Follow-up Date

Relationship Categories:

- No relationship: Never met or interacted
- Aware: They know who you are but no real relationship
- Acquaintance: Occasional interaction, basic familiarity
- Professional: Regular work-related interaction and respect

- Personal: Trust, shared values, and mutual support
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Success Story Examples

Case Study 1: Detroit Water Justice Coalition

Challenge: Mass water shutoffs affecting 100,000+ Detroit residents

Power Analysis Insights:

- Identified city council as key decision-point
- Mapped relationships between council members and community groups
- Found allies in faith communities and labor unions
- Recognized importance of media narrative and public opinion

Coalition Strategy:

- Combined grassroots organizing with policy advocacy
- Used moral authority of faith leaders and affected families
- Built solidarity between Detroit and suburban communities
- Connected local struggle to international human rights framework

Outcomes:

- Established water affordability program for low-income residents
- Created community voice in water governance through advisory board
- Stopped mass shutoffs during COVID-19 pandemic
- Inspired similar organizing in cities across the United States

Key Lessons:

- Personal stories and moral authority can shift public narrative
- Coalition diversity strengthens political and public influence
- Inside-outside strategy combines policy work with grassroots pressure
- Local wins can inspire broader movement building

Case Study 2: Standing Rock Water Protectors

Challenge: Dakota Access Pipeline threatening tribal water sources and sacred sites

Power Analysis Insights:

- Identified multiple decision-makers: federal agencies, state government, corporations
- Recognized importance of public opinion and media coverage
- Built on Indigenous sovereignty and treaty rights framework
- Connected environmental protection with cultural preservation

Coalition Strategy:

- Centered Indigenous leadership and traditional knowledge
- Built solidarity between tribal nations across North America
- Engaged environmental and social justice allies nationwide
- Used cultural expressions (prayer, ceremony, art) to communicate values

Outcomes:

- Temporarily halted pipeline construction through federal intervention
- Elevated Indigenous water rights in national consciousness
- Inspired global indigenous solidarity and environmental movements
- Demonstrated power of combining traditional governance with modern organizing

Key Lessons:

- Indigenous leadership brings moral authority and traditional knowledge
- Cultural expression can be powerful tool for communication and organizing
- Coalition solidarity can overcome resource and power disadvantages
- Legal strategies must be combined with political and cultural organizing



Getting Started: Your First 30 Days

Week 1: Foundation Building

- **Day 1-2:** Define your water justice goal and core message
- **Day 3-4:** Initial stakeholder brainstorming with core team
- **Day 5-7:** Research key decision-makers and their positions

Week 2: Mapping and Analysis

- **Day 8-10:** Create initial power map with team input
- **Day 11-12:** Research stakeholder backgrounds, interests, and relationships
- **Day 13-14:** Identify potential coalition partners and allies

Week 3: Relationship Building

- **Day 15-17:** Reach out to natural allies and begin conversations
- **Day 18-19:** Meet with neutral stakeholders to share your perspective
- **Day 20-21:** Research and analyze opposition arguments and strategies

Week 4: Strategy Development

- **Day 22-24:** Develop coalition-building strategy and timeline
- **Day 25-26:** Create action plan with specific targets and tactics
- **Day 27-28:** Finalize messaging and communication strategy
- **Day 29-30:** Launch first public action or outreach effort

Monthly Review Process

- **Power Map Updates:** Revise stakeholder positions and relationships
- **Coalition Assessment:** Evaluate partner contributions and needs
- **Strategy Adjustment:** Adapt tactics based on response and results
- **Capacity Building:** Identify training and resource needs for next phase

Recommended Reading

- "Rules for Radicals" by Saul Alinsky
- "Organizing for the 21st Century" by Kim Bobo
- "Training for Change" organizing resources
- "Beautiful Trouble" creative resistance tactics

Online Tools

- **Action Builder:** Coalition management and relationship tracking
- **NationBuilder:** Voter and supporter database management
- **Mobilize:** Event organizing and volunteer coordination
- **Slack/Discord:** Internal coalition communication

Training Organizations

- **National Domestic Workers Alliance:** Organizing training programs
- **Center for Community Change:** Policy advocacy and organizing
- **Training for Change:** Nonviolent direct action and campaign strategy
- **Midwest Academy:** Community organizing and power analysis

Water Justice Networks

- **Environmental Justice Coalition for Water** (California)
- **US Water Alliance:** National water equity advocacy
- **Food & Water Watch:** Corporate accountability and public ownership
- **Indigenous Environmental Network:** Indigenous water rights and sovereignty

Remember: Power analysis is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing process of understanding, relationship-building, and strategic adaptation. Use this toolkit as a starting point, but always adapt strategies to your specific community context, cultural values, and political opportunities.

Your water justice organizing starts with understanding power—and builds toward shifting it toward community control and planetary healing.