Knowledge is power. Or at least it is the beginning of power. You will want to know everything you can about your workplace and your employer. Workplace “mapping” is one of the most effective ways of examining the strength and weaknesses of your branch. This will be a long term, on-going process of education.

**AN INTRODUCTION TO MAPPING**

How can we hope to involve people or even have effective two-way communication when we don’t know where they work, who they work with or who is the best person to speak to them?

And without this information how can we effectively plan and make decisions about workplace, branch, group or national strategy or priorities?

Mapping is the process of obtaining accurate and relevant information about the workforce in a systematic way. If done properly it can form the basis of successful union activity, including recruitment communications, development of activists and campaigning around issues.

Mapping is a very useful tool for recruiting and developing activists. The information you gather can tell you:

* who is supportive of the union,
* who the natural leaders are,
* which staff could be persuaded if approached,
* who is anti-union and
* what the issues are in that area

This gives you a framework for identifying members who are most likely to get active or help in each workplace and who the committee thinks would be useful to have involved.

Your map can be used for many purposes;

*Recruitment campaigns* – Using the map to identify areas of the workplace or branch where there are low numbers of members can help in making sure that resources are used most effectively. If the map also contains information on the issues that members care about we will be able to make sure the messages that we send to workers are relevant.

*Communication networks* – An organised workplace is one where there is regular and effective two-way communication between members and their reps. A workplace map can be used to develop a communications network that can be used to not just tell members what the union is doing, but also make sure that the union can pick up valuable information about what members and non-members think and feel about what’s happening at work.

*Running campaigns* – By including information on key workplace issues in the map, the union can decide which issues to run campaigns around. These can be issues to target new members, or more widely felt issues that might build activism.

Mapping isn’t a task that you should do alone – in fact it’s a great way to get people to ‘do something union’. But the very fact that you are out there mapping as a union team, talking to people, seeking information and asking their opinions means you’ll have started your organising effort.

What information to collect

The only restriction on what information you might include in your map is that it should be kept to what will be useful in helping you build the union and/or run a campaign. That said, most useful maps will contain all the following;

* Numbers of workers in each area of the workplace (including gender, race, age etc.)
* Working patterns and employment type (full/part time, permanent, contract etc.)
* Job role
* Number of members and non-members in each area of the workplace
* Information on numbers and location of reps

The information that you include in your workplace map can be kept in whatever format works best for those who are using it, but you should make sure that whatever system you use is accessible, easy to update and easy to analyse.

Building a membership profile

If we are serious about engaging with members and potential members, we need to make sure we know as much about them as possible. What are the things that are influencing their decision to join the union (or not) or become more active if they’re already a member? Are there any identifiable differences between the profile of members and non-members or between members and activists?

Be sure that you identify and pay attention to any underrepresented groups amongst your members. You may need to make a pecial effort to engage with them to gain an understanding of what barriers might stand in their way of getting active and how together you might remove them.

Building a membership profile can inform how you approach the task of recruiting new members and finding new activists.

Information that you might include in an effective membership profile would be;

* Gender
* Age
* Ethnicity
* Childcare responsibilities
* Working patterns
* Employment status
* Information on workers with disabilities
* The jobs that workers do

This information can be kept separately or added to your workplace map.

Identifying organising challenges

Of course, maps and plans aren’t produced just for the sake of finding out what’s happening in the workplace. They are important tools that can help us to prioritise activity and get the most out of the resources we have available.

When you analyse your map, the following questions should assist you to identify the things to prioirtise;

* Where are there low levels of membership?
* How many reps are there and where are they based?
* Does the profile of the members/activists match that of the workforce (are there any underrepresented groups)?
* Is membership spread evenly across the workplace/company or is it concentrated in a few areas?
* Are there significant numbers of part time, contract staff or others on zero hours contracts?

Once you have a clear understanding of the current strengths and weaknesses of the unions’ organisation, you can decide what your aims and objectives are going to be.

Using resources

As you start to implement your campaign you will need to think about the resources that you have available. Don’t just think of the obvious resources such as how much money is in the branch account, there are other less obvious resources that can be used to build the union.

* People – reps and members
* Facility time and facilities such as phones, access to email and meeting rooms
* Printing and distribution
* National and regional union resources

Structure tests

At some point in a campaign, it becomes important to know how much strength of feeling there is behind the issue. So, organisers often use something called a ‘structure test’ to see whether there is a wider view that the issue is important to a larger group. If there is, the campaign can go ahead knowing that it is a good investment of time and energy. If there isn’t, then the issue might be more effectively dealt with as a personal case, or a small collective grievance brought by a group of staff.

Structure tests are really just about finding out who’s with you. It can be something as simple as calling a meeting on the issue and seeing who turns up. Or it could be a survey of members to see who is willing to volunteer to help out. The key is that a good structure test will help you work out how much support there is to take action on the issue. It’s really important not to miss this step.