

Resource

Guide to Power Mapping

The following language and images have been adapted from materials created by Wellstone, The Texas Freedom Education Fund, and Strategic Concepts in Policy and Education.

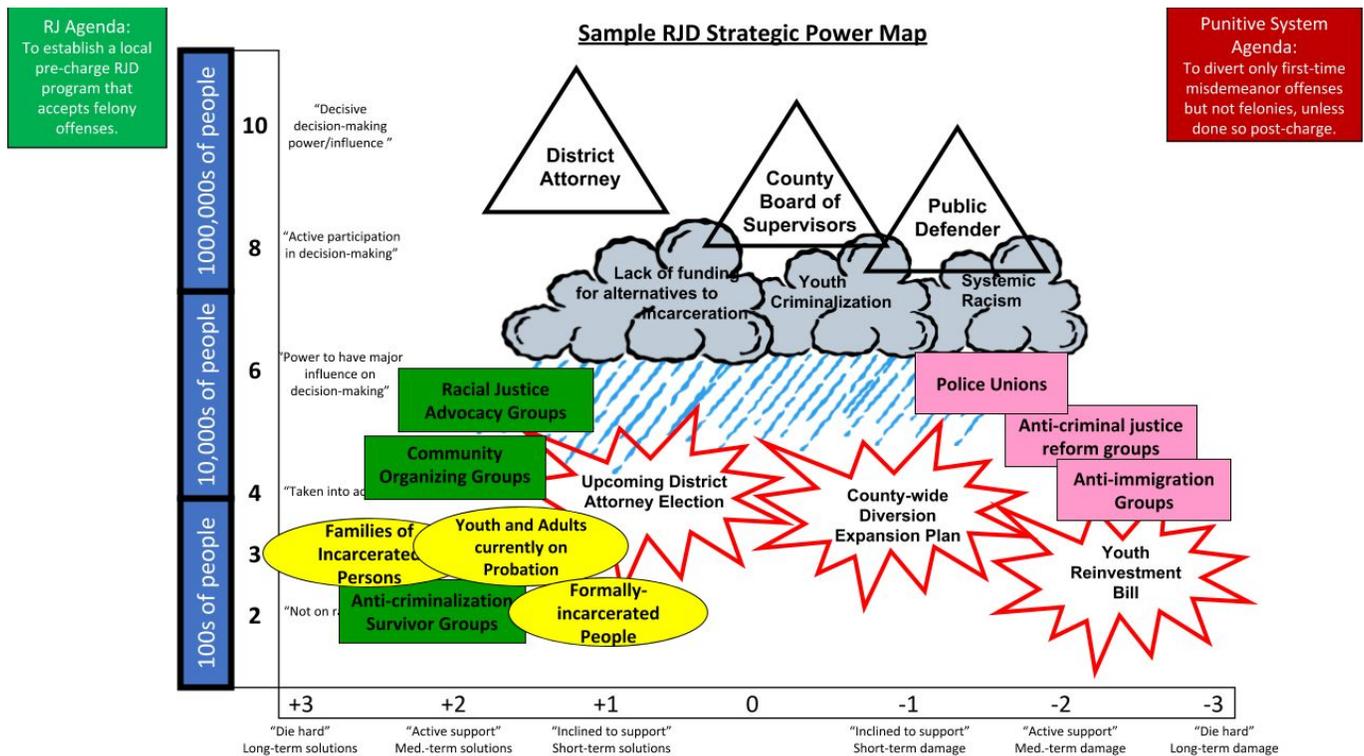
Now that you've decided to work toward developing this model of restorative justice diversion (RJD) in your community, it's time to assess the socio-political environment you're operating within. Oftentimes, power is not discussed or considered in restorative justice practices, perhaps because the circle process is meant to distribute power evenly throughout a group of circle participants. Nonetheless, power disparities and imbalances are very much a part of our lived realities. It's important to learn where socio-political power is currently concentrated in order to move toward a world where decision-makers can be in "power with" communities, rather than continue to have "power over" them.

It is with this paradigm shift in mind that we ask folks to approach "Power Mapping" (sometimes called "Power Analysis") from a restorative place, with a focus on relationship and community building. Power mapping is a visual representation of where power relationships currently stand around the issues your group cares about. It is a first step in planning how you can restoratively rearrange power dynamics to achieve the change that you are working toward.



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Example of a Power Map



A map like this, made for your unique situation, can be a big help in understanding the power dynamics that could impact your RJD program.

A note about “Restorative Power Mapping”

It is important to point out that while power mapping is an integral element of traditional community organizing, a community-led process to develop this model of RJD should also be restorative in nature. This means that while it’s crucial to identify opponents and their current levels of power, the way you address this opposition should always promote community building and healing - not increase contention and divisiveness. Rather than seeing people as opponents that must be defeated or neutralized, restorative organizing calls us to view them as members of society who may not be in right relationship with others and may be using their power to cause harm, but whose liberation is nonetheless bound entirely with our own. The shifting and more equitable distribution of power should not come from targeting or attacking the weaknesses of your opponents, but instead from uplifting the strengths and wisdom of all your allies (including unlikely allies) and your ever-growing, beloved community.

Elements of the Power Map

A power map contains key elements:

Major Problems or Conditions

Shown as the grey clouds in the map above. These are the current conditions and problems in your community that signal or establish a need for this model of RJD. In other words, what current problems or conditions could RJD help improve or resolve? Some common problems are over-policing of communities of color, criminalization of people of color (particularly youth of color), lack of accessible services or resources for young people, the cradle-to-prison pipeline, little to no community-based alternatives to incarceration, etc. These can be put in the middle of the page as core elements of your environment.

Conflicting Agendas

Apart from your general agenda to develop this model of restorative justice diversion in your community, it's important to specify the goals that are unique to your community (i.e. in what zip codes, for what offenses, etc. will this model of RJD be used). That is your specific agenda. The competing agenda, the one that would uphold the current situation or even increase youth criminalization, contradicts yours. Your agenda can be written in the top left corner of your power map and your competing agenda on the opposite side.

Major Issues/Policy Battles

Shown as the red star shapes above. These are points or situations of conflict, competition, controversy, or discourse currently taking place in your community that are related to the goals of your agenda and could somehow worsen or improve the problems and conditions you identified earlier. Examples of major issues or policy battles are upcoming political elections (particularly those of your decision-makers), the proposition of a criminal legal system-related federal, state or local bill, plans for investment or divestment in certain criminal justice or youth-serving programs and services, county-wide plans to increase or decrease alternatives to incarceration or detention, etc.

Decision-Makers

Shown as the white triangles above. These are the people who actually make the decisions for pre-charge RJD to become a reality. These folks are typically elected or appointed by constituencies and have the power to give your group what it wants. Some decision-makers are criminal legal systems agencies and some are not. In most jurisdictions, the primary decision-makers are also the systems agencies with whom you must build relationships that will be maintained throughout implementation. These include, the district attorney (sometimes known as the state attorney or county prosecutor), the public defender, chief of probation, and if present in your jurisdiction, heads of other juvenile legal departments. While this RJD model can arguably be implemented with just commitment from a district attorney to refer cases, you should also learn where other decision-makers stand (either in support or in opposition), as well as the amount of power they have to impact your efforts.

Aside from systems agencies, other decision-makers or decision-making bodies to consider including on your power analysis grid that are the county board of supervisors, mayors, or city council members. Systems partner profiles can be used to help you figure out where to place your decision-makers on the power map.

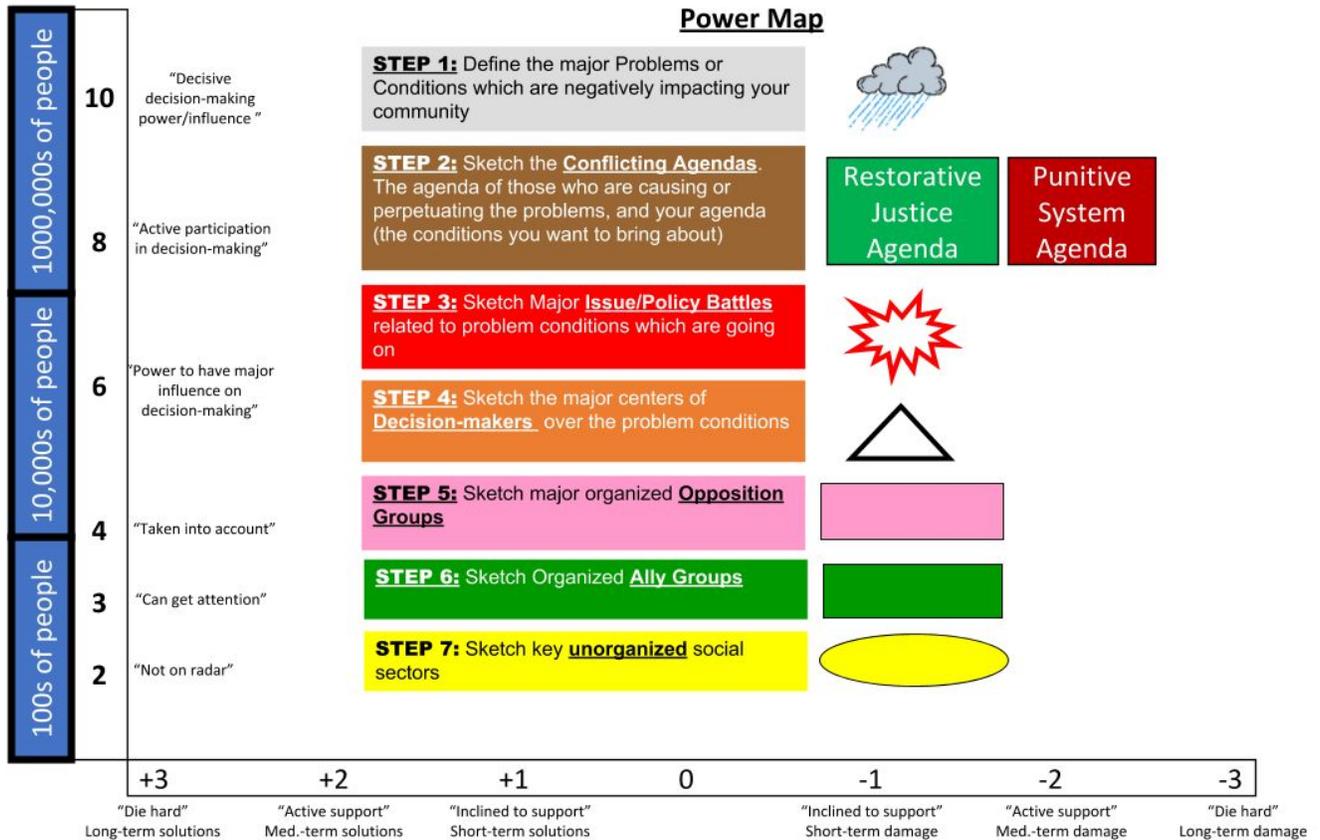
Organized Ally Groups Shown as the green boxes above. These are organized groups that support this model of RJD specifically and/or other similar social justice movements such as youth justice, racial justice, economic justice, criminal legal system reform, community-based alternatives to incarceration, decriminalization of youth of color, etc. Organized allies are considered secondary entities in our power map grid because they can influence decision-makers.

Organized Opposition Groups Shown as the pink boxes above. These are organized groups who oppose this RJD model. Similar to organized allies, organized opposition are also secondary entities because of their ability to exert influence on decision-makers rather than make the decisions themselves.

Unorganized Public Sectors Shown as the yellow ovals above. These are folks in your community who may not necessarily be part of organized groups (yet), but do have commonalities that could potentially bring them together. More importantly, they are members of your community who may or may not be interested in supporting or opposing this model of RJD. Therefore, they should be considered possible influences on decision-makers. It's also important to identify unorganized groups because they may be folks in your community who would very much like to get involved in supporting your efforts to develop this model of RJD by sharing their wisdom, voices, and power with others, but don't quite know where to start.

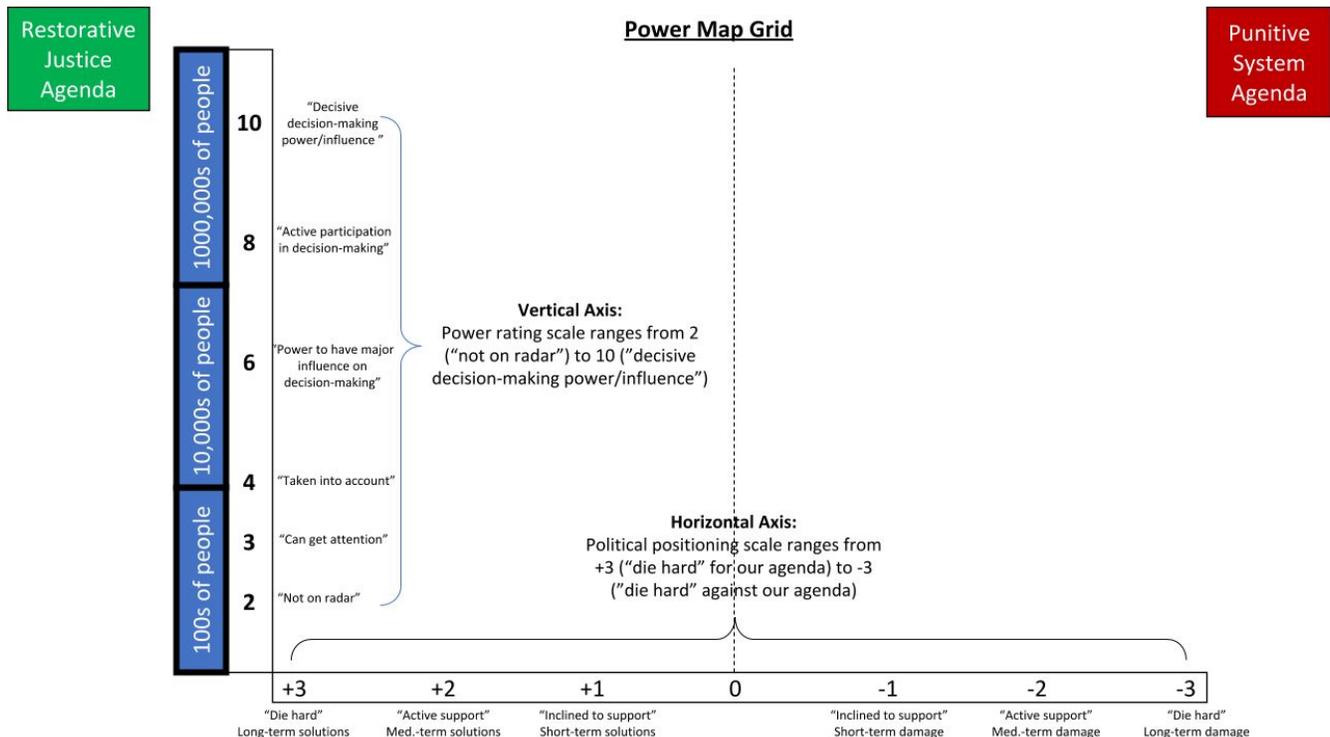
All of these symbols—cloud, red star, white triangle, etc.—are shown in the steps diagram below.

Steps to Creating a Strategic Power Map



The Power Map Grid

Once you've identified who and what should populate your power map, you need to examine the power grid itself.



As you can see, the vertical axis is a scale of 0-10, which directly corresponds to a person's decision-making power. There are few, if any, "10s" – people with absolute power who can make your group's vision a reality with a snap of their fingers. Equally so, there are few, if any, "0s" – people with no sway whatsoever. More likely, you'll find yourself placing people who are able to make decisions and/or exert strong influence along the "8" or "9" side of the scale. For example, a person who is placed at "8" is someone who is sitting in the room as an active participant when the decision is being made.

While most decision-makers are at this level, few organized groups operate here. Rather, groups can be placed at the "5" or "7" level if they are able to meet with a decision-maker and generate press coverage about an issue. These groups have power because their opinions will be taken into consideration by decision-makers due to their demonstrated ability to effectively organize their members. Less effective organizations should be placed at a "2" or "3" level.

The horizontal axis measures relative support for your goal. Core constituencies and die-hard supporters occupy the far left of this axis. These groups and individuals not only support this model of RJD on

paper, they are also actively engaged in working with you and commit resources like time, energy, thought partnership, and funding to your cause. These individuals may be the founding members of your cause, like your community-based organization (yes, you should include yourselves on the grid!).

Organizations and individuals who fall into the “Active Support” portion of this axis include those who give you their verbal or written endorsement. They may write a letter or provide public comment in support of RJD. However, the distinguishing factor between “Active Supporters” and “Die Hards” is that Active Supporters don’t commit significant resources to help you achieve your goals, whereas Die Hards adopt an “all hands on deck” mentality. Groups should be placed in the “Inclined Towards” section if they are likely allies who share an ideological predisposition for support, have worked with you in the past, or are major stakeholders who will be impacted positively by your agenda.

The middle area of this axis is for groups and individuals whose stance is neutral or unknown. Organizations who are most likely opposed based on their beliefs and/or practices should be placed in the “Inclined Against” portion of the axis. Groups who have publicly dismissed your cause or voiced their opposition should be classified as “Active 5”.

Finally, groups that are not only adamantly against your goal, but are also allocating resources to prevent this model of RJD from happening, should be deemed as “Die Hard Against.” While it may seem counterintuitive to include decision-makers and groups who are against your cause in your power map, it’s actually critical to incorporate them as you assess your environment. Knowing and, more importantly, understanding your opposition and their connections allows you to anticipate situations in which their active disagreement may hinder your progress.

Once you’ve identified all elements of your power map and plotted all decision-makers, allies, and opponents in accordance to their levels of power and support, your power analysis is complete and may look something like the sample power map we included at the start. Always remember that a power map is a living document and can change at any time. Hopefully it *will* change, as new relationships are built or strengthened and support increases in your community. Return to your power map during times of change, such as after elections or other political shifts. Also, consider revisiting it in preparation for meetings or other interactions with systems partners, community groups, or other organizations.

Restorative
Justice
Agenda

Power Analysis Grid

Punitive
System
Agenda

