

HOW POWER ACTUALLY WORKS – POWER ANALYSIS FOR CAMPAIGNERS

Understanding who holds power and how it moves is critical for effective campaigns. Without this, campaigns risk being symbolic, mis-targeted, or inefficient. This handout will help you identify power, understand influence pathways, and plan strategic actions.

WHY IT MATTERS

Knowing who actually makes decisions lets you focus your energy where it will have the most impact. Campaigns that ignore power risk being frustrating or ineffective.

FORMAL VS INFORMAL POWER

Formal power is held by people with official authority to make decisions. Examples include politicians, ministers, bureaucrats, CEOs, and boards.

Informal power comes from influence rather than official authority. Examples include donors, media editors, union leaders, activists, public opinion, and community leaders.

INFLUENCE PATHWAYS

Power can be influenced through many channels. Think about: media coverage, social media campaigns, donor pressure, bureaucratic processes, public campaigns, protests, meetings with decision-makers, and building alliances. Understanding these pathways is key to designing effective strategies.

POWER MAPPING TOOLS

An influence grid is a simple way to map actors according to their interest and power. Stakeholder mapping identifies supporters, opponents, and people who can influence the outcome. These tools help you see who to focus on first and what strategies to use.

PRACTICAL STEPS

1. Identify the goal of your campaign. What change are you trying to achieve?
2. List the people or organisations who have the power to make this change happen.
3. Distinguish between formal and informal power. Who can make the decision and who can influence it?
4. Identify influence pathways. How could you reach, persuade, or pressure these actors?
5. Plot a simple power map or grid. Consider interest vs power, allies vs opponents.
6. Decide who your first targets should be and what actions you will take.

TIP: Think strategically. A small, well-targeted action aimed at the right person can have more impact than a big public stunt aimed at someone who can't make the decision.

Power Map Example: Campaign to Increase Public Housing in SA

Goal: Secure funding for 1000 new public houses in 2027

Who Holds Power?

Formal Power – people who can make the decision: Minister for Housing, Cabinet, Department of Housing executives, Local MPs on the housing committee

Informal Power – people who influence the decision: influential journalists, community leaders, union leaders, social service CEOs, major donors, public opinion

Influence Pathways

Media – opinion pieces, news stories, social media campaigns

Direct Advocacy – meetings with MPs, lobbying, petitions

Community Pressure – rallies, letters from affected residents, local council motions

Allies – unions, tenant advocacy groups, faith-based organizations

Stakeholder Mapping (Simple Grid)

High Influence / High Support – Tenant advocacy groups, unions, some local MPs

High Influence / Low Support – Minister for Housing, Cabinet, major donors

Low Influence / High Support – Local residents, students, volunteers

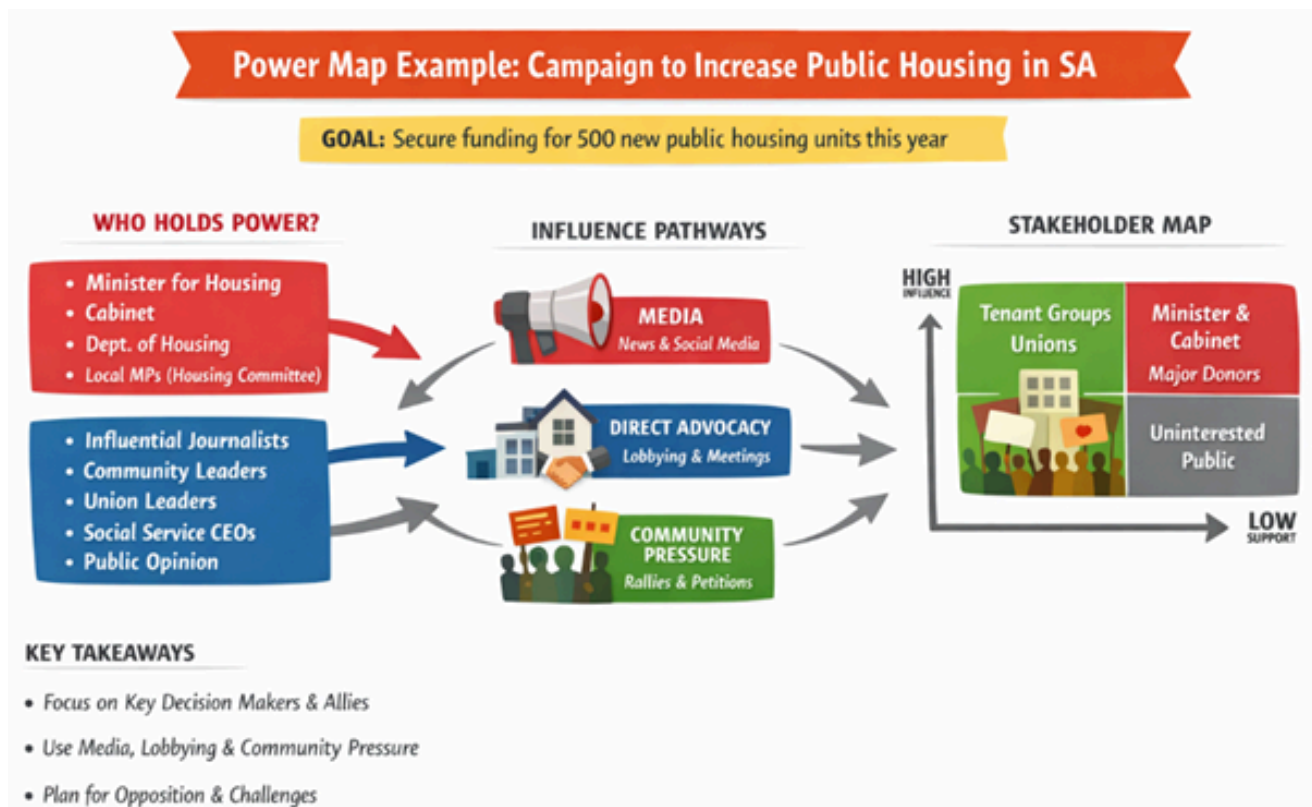
Low Influence / Low Support – General public with low awareness

Takeaways

Target your energy where it counts – focus on high influence people and allies

Use multiple influence pathways – media, direct advocacy, and community pressure together

Know who can block progress – plan strategies to address opposition or low support



HOW CAMPAIGNS ACTUALLY WIN: A SIMPLE THEORY OF CHANGE

Understand the four levers that drive real campaign outcomes and how to apply them strategically.
The goal: Decision-Maker Change

The Four Levers:

Public Pressure

- Who: Citizens, voters, media attention
- How: Petitions, protests, letters to MPs

Political Risk

- Who: Decision-makers facing electoral, financial, or reputational risk
- How: Councils, ministers, CEOs changing position under scrutiny

Narrative Shift

- Who: The general public, media, and opinion-shapers
- How: Stories, campaigns, lived-experience advocacy, social media

Organised People

- Who: Networks, coalitions, community groups
- How: Volunteers, unions, coordinated campaigns

Check your campaign:

Map your campaign against these four levers. Have we applied public pressure effectively?

- Are decision-makers facing political risk?
- Are we shifting the narrative?
- Are people organised and coordinated?

Are we activating each lever? Which lever is strongest? Where could you build more capacity? How can you connect the levers to maximise impact?

