

## ACTIVITY 8

# Personal Network Mapping

### 🕒 TIMING

It's important that the map's complexity fits the purpose of the exercise and the time allotted. At NLN, we dedicate a **minimum of 2 hours** for this exercise.

### ★ EXPERTISE

It is helpful but not required to have a facilitator with a **working knowledge of network strategy and mapping**. It is very possible to facilitate a network mapping session with adequate preparation and supportive tools and processes.

## PURPOSE

To determine whether a leader's network assets (who they know and work with) align with what they see as their future work.

## USE

This is a great exercise to create visibility around who is enabling or inhibiting our ability to achieve greater impact. At NLN, we have most effectively used network mapping to help leaders align existing or new relationships with their strategies.

## FACILITATION

The goal of the exercise is to create a visual of the current state of that leader's network (their relationships) and invite feedback from others about whether it serves that leader's aspirations.

**What's needed:** Each participating leader will need a poster-sized paper and Post-its of different colors and sizes. The room should have ample wall or table space so that each leader can spread out as they build their map. It's important to take pictures of the map at the end of the exercise.

### Instructions:

- 1 Introduce why network mapping is relevant to amplifying a leader's impact on a system. It is also important to provide definitions of key terms for network maps. Relevant slides are available on our website.
- 2 Have the leaders brainstorm the purpose or goal they intend to map. Make clear that networks are often organized around a specific goal. Facilitators should encourage leaders to focus on broad goals, even when that goal is highly aspirational. The final purpose statement is written on a 4x6 Post-it.
- 3 Have leaders share their final purpose statements in pairs or small groups. Facilitators should intervene if a leader is struggling to focus the inquiry.
- 4 Describe the full process to creating a simple hand-drawn network map. Relevant slides are available on our website.



**Instructions (continued):**

- Take 15 minutes to brainstorm what people or organizations are essential to the purpose that leader has committed to (our “network relationships”). This includes key colleagues; influential but more removed ambassadors; or those who are roadblocks to progress. Write each name on a small Post-it. Encourage the leaders to be strategic rather than comprehensive. If helpful, they can use different colors of notes to denote those who inhibit or promote their success.
- Direct leaders to place their purpose Post-it in the center of a poster-sized paper. Then, leaders should place each smaller Post-it to represent where a specific relationship sits relative to the leader’s purpose. If a person or organization is key to achieving the leader’s purpose, that Post-it will be close to the center. If someone is remote, they will be further away.
- Now, direct leaders to rearrange the Post-its to also reflect the relationships between the people and organizations on their map. This will require them to create clusters of organizations and people that work closely together. Again, facilitators should brainstorm with leaders on how to accurately represent the network they envision.

- 5 Pair leaders to discuss whether their network assets support their purpose. Possible conversation prompts include: *What is my network positioned to do? Who has power in my network? Who is missing from my network? What barriers or opportunities exist that I was previously unaware of? What would my network look like if I was achieving my purpose? What changes need to happen?*

- 6 Finally, reconvene the group. Lead a reflection to understand what leaders have learned and determine possible next steps.

## WHAT WE’RE LEARNING

- ✓ In making the networks visible to themselves and others, leaders often realize that they don’t have the network of relationships they need to achieve their aspirations. Perhaps they are spending too much time with the wrong people or have made assumptions about what relationships among others means for their work. Either way, the visibility promotes their thinking about what needs to happen next.
- ✓ Often leaders get lost in this exercise because they overdo the detail of people they are mapping, or their purpose statement is too broad. Facilitators should monitor the leaders’ energy and help them clarify what will be most useful given their stated purpose.

WHAT WOULD MY NETWORK

LOOK LIKE IF I WAS

ACHIEVING MY PURPOSE?

WHAT CHANGES NEED

TO HAPPEN?