



TOOL | MAPPING OUR ECOSYSTEM

An ecosystem map is a visual depiction of the landscape within an initiative operates. Creating a map of your issue’s ecosystem can be a useful way to identify larger systemic issues and problems at play. It can also help to reveal the complexity and dynamics between various elements within the system.



A Sample Ecosystem Map

Source: [Northwest Nonprofit Notes](#)

TOOL DESCRIPTION

An ecosystem map is a visual depiction of the landscape within an initiative operates. When we depict an ecosystem in the form of a visual map, it can be an important step in learning and understanding that can reveal insights, connections, leverage and breakthroughs for affecting your issue.

USING THIS TOOL WILL HELP YOU:

- Identify gaps in essential services and functions
- Strategize beyond symptoms of an issue
- Discover the larger systemic issues and dynamics between elements
- Establish a scope for your work.

TOOL HOW-TO

1. Identify the players in your ecosystem (including yourself). This could include:
 - **Resource Providers** – All people who contribute time, money, knowledge & information to your issue.
 - **Key Allies & Complementary Movements** – These are your primary partners, allied organizations and complementary movements.
 - **Key Stakeholders** – These are individuals/groups that stand to gain most from solving issue – including clients, beneficiaries, customers
 - **Opponents & Problem-Makers** – These are the individuals & organizations that are actively working against you and/or creating the problem or making it worse.
 - **Influential Bystanders** – These individuals have power and influence and aren’t currently activated by your cause but who might be and/or those who are affected by your issue tangentially.

2. Brainstorm a list of the conditions that affect your issue. This could include:
 - **Political and/or Administrative Processes & Structures** – This might include new laws, rules, regulations, processes, procedures, corruption
 - **Economics** – This includes economic health, distribution of wealth, growth of markets, trends in fundraising
 - **Geography & Infrastructure** – These includes factors such as physical location, transportation, communication, urban/rural/suburban issues
 - **Societal Norms & Culture** – This includes: norms, beliefs, values, cultural memes, social networks, demographic trends.
 - **Research** – This includes: scientific breakthroughs, relevant studies, impact trends

3. Create a visual map. While there is no single RIGHT way draw an ecosystem map, the following guidelines are useful:
 - **Create Your Map Collaboratively** – Those involved in the strategy and planning for your initiative should be engaged in constructing the map together. Depending on the size of your group, you may co-construct a single map, or each develop drafts and then create a new, shared map that reflects the synergies and differences of the various maps.
 - **Different People Have Different Styles** – As with all tools, some will find this easy and others will find it more difficult, some want lots of detail, others are satisfied with the basic elements. Acknowledging these differences may help all stay engaged in the map creation process.
 - **Don't Over-Emphasize Your Own Organization's Role** – Be mindful of separating your organization/role from the issue. Becoming too focused on your own role can actually hinder the value of the process and prevent you from appreciating new relationships and dynamics

4. Engage in Sense-making together. Remember your map is most useful if it helps to generate new insights and options for action. Suggested reflection questions include:
 - What are the dilemmas or opportunities we see in our ecosystem map?
 - What conditions in our environment most need to change in order to make headway on our issue, and how can we influence and encourage that change?
 - Are there key players or roles missing from our ecosystem?
 - Is our organization (still) relevant?
 - What new innovations or functions might we introduce to our ecosystem that would have the most positive impact?

Notes: