READING POWER

How to Understand Power

Consider

- ➔ Why does having civic power matter in your own life?
- ➔ Who makes you feel cared for?
- ➔ Who or what do you care about supporting, protecting, or fighting for?

Watch

"How to Understand Power" from Eric Liu

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Use a QR reader or visit qrco.de/understand_power to find the full video.

"Every day, we move and operate within systems of power that other people have constructed. But we're often uncomfortable talking about power. Why?"



Eric Liu is the co-founder and CEO of Citizen University. He also directs the Aspen Institute's Citizenship & American Identity Program. He is the author of several books, including The Gardens of Democracy (co-authored with Nick Hanauer); You're More Powerful Than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen; and Become America: Civic Sermons on Love, Responsibility, and Democracy. Eric served as a White House speechwriter for President Bill Clinton and later as deputy domestic policy adviser. He has served as a board member of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Washington State Board of Education, and the Seattle Public Library and is a co-founder of the Alliance for Gun Responsibility.

⚡Power is the ability to have others do as you would want them to do.

Sources + Conduits

Sources of power help us think about what we can do; they can shape strategies for responding to a problem.

- ☐ Violence → physical force
- ☐ Wealth → creates the ability to buy results
- ☐ State action → using bureaucracy to compel people to do/not do things
- ☐ Ideas → e.g. individual liberty, racial justice, etc.; these can move people, money, and militaries
- ☐ Social norms → what other people is is ok can make people change behavior, or laws
- ☐ Numbers → lots of people; numbers express legitimacy – and can challenge what's considered legitimate

Conduits are the people and places we can turn to for collaboration—or those we need to fight against—to advance our priorities in civic life.

- ☐ Organizations
- ☐ Networks
- ☐ Laws
- ☐ Narrative

The Laws of Power

 **Law 1 • Power Concentrates**	 **Law 2 • Power Justifies Itself**	 **Law 3 • Power is Infinite**
Power feeds on itself and compounds. So does powerlessness. Those who already have power tend to get more. Those without power tend to keep getting left out.	People find a story to tell themselves and others about why they deserve the power they have. People also invent stories about why they don't deserve or can't access power.	Power is not a zero-sum game. There is no limit on the amount of power people can create. Increasing your personal power doesn't require you to take power away from someone else.

PRACTICING POWER

The Lessons of Power

Consider the Imperatives

If power is always concentrating, you must... **Change the Game**	Think about the parts of any game; rules, strategies, playing field, players, how you earn points... ➔ What new rules can be created? ➔ What new strategies can you employ? ➔ What new spaces can you spread into? ➔ What new people can you engage?
If power tells stories to justify Itself, you must... **Change the Story**	Think about the parts of any story: plot, narrative, storyteller... ➔ How can you tell new or different stories about essential needs and priorities? ➔ Can you focus on different content? ➔ Can you use different language or vocabulary? ➔ Who is best suited to tell and amplify new stories?
If power is Infinite, you must... **Change the Equation**	Think about the parts of an equation: the figures on different sides, the way things compute, the outcome... ➔ How can you add, subtract, divide, or multiply various forms of power at play? ➔ What can you plant seeds for, or activate more of? ➔ Is there anything you can work to lessen?

Reflect

➔ How have you seen (or been part of) a group of people bring about real, meaningful change, using one or some of these lessons?

Power Mapping

This series of questions can help you see, notice, or get more clarity about the community needs you want to address. Follow the steps below to determine your interests and goals—and discover the ways you might achieve them!

Note: This is a great resource to use before, or alongside the Practicing Power packet included later in this workbook. It is inspired by You're More Powerful than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen (2017), by Eric Liu. It is also inspired by the Design Thinking Bootleg by Scott Doorley, Sarah Holcomb, Perry Klebahn, Kathryn Segovia, and Jeremy Utley from Stanford's d.school. To learn more visit dschool.stanford.edu/resources/design-thinking-bootleg.

Step 1: Observe → Look Deep 

You've already done some reflecting on your community: the people, places and things that play a big role in your life. Review your Identity Map to remind yourself what makes up your community. To get started in this Personal Power Mapping process, turn up the volume on your attention:

Try to get out and experience your community. Get curious about what happens, how it happens, and what might be a need or challenge facing the people who make up a community that matters to you. Try to empathize with how other people act and behave, and imagine why they might act that way. Observe how people interact with their environment. Capture quotes, behaviors and other notes that reflect their experience.

Watching gives you clues into how others think and feel — which can lead you to understand what they need. Find ways to immerse yourself in some of the specific communities you listed on your Identity Map. The best solutions come from the best insights into the emotions that drive people's behavior. Uncover community needs (which people may or may not be aware of).

Tip for observing: Assume a beginner's mindset. Observe and engage without value judgments. Question everything, even (and especially) the things you think you already understand. Be truly curious. Strive to assume a posture of wonder. Find patterns. Look for interesting themes that emerge.

Community characteristics

- What is your community like? How do things seem and feel? Use tons of adjectives to describe the qualities you notice about your community.

Community behaviors

- What do people in your community do? What do they produce or participate in? Use tons of verbs to describe the actions you notice in your community.

Community needs

- What do people in your community need or need more of? What's missing?
- What are people struggling with?
- What challenges do community members face individually? What challenges does the community face as a group?

Step 2: Brainstorm → Open Your Mind 

Now that you've collected observations from yourself and others, it's time to dream big about how you might work to create impact. Don't start by thinking about what's doable or practical (we'll get there). Start by really expanding your heart and mind into the widest, wildest possibilities. What would you do if you could do anything?

What are some of your big hopes for your community?

- Why are these important to you?

What are some of your big fears about or for your community?

- Why are these concerning to you?

Make a list of issues/ideas that...

- ➔ Energize you
- ➔ Frustrate you
- ➔ Inspire you

Reflect...

- ➔ When do you feel proud of your community?
- ➔ When do you feel disappointed in your community?
- ➔ What do you wish more people were talking about?
- ➔ What is the best thing about your community?

Make some big wishes!

- ➔ If you could snap your fingers and change things for your community, what would you change?

Step 3: Define → Develop Action Statements



Review your notes & brainstorm from Step 1: Observation. What issues or ideas are jumping out at you? What sparks are you interested in nurturing into a bigger flame?

1. Circle or highlight things you want to keep exploring.
2. Choose some ideas from your brainstorm.
3. Put each of those ideas into a simple sentence that starts with the words, "I will" and follows with a verb. Try choosing something that feels "impossible"; see where it takes you!



Examples:

- ☐ *"I will end hunger in my neighborhood"*
- ☐ *"I will encourage young people across the country to vote"*
- ☐ *"I will infuse joy into my student's after school experiences"*

Step 4: Imagine → Identify Tactics 

1. Choose one or two ideas from the previous step to continue working with.
2. For each of those action statements, brainstorm ideas about how you could achieve that goal. What tactics can you dream up? These should also start with a verb! See how many ideas you can generate. (This is an excellent point in the process for inviting other input. Ask friends, family, colleagues, peers, any interested party to offer tactical ideas.)
3. Then, take stock. Which of the ideas that have come up are exciting to you? Write down some notes so you can continue working with them.

Examples:

- ☐ *"I will end hunger in my neighborhood → by organizing a community potluck"*
- ☐ *"I will encourage young people across the country to vote → by creating a digital peer-to-peer network"*
- ☐ *"I will infuse joy into my student's after school experiences → by celebrating small wins more often"*

Tips for generating ideas: The goal here is to ideate; the mode in which you generate radical design alternatives. Ideation is a process of going wide in terms of concepts and outcomes—a mode of flaring instead of focus. The goal of ideation is to explore a wide solution space—both a large quantity and broad diversity of ideas. From this vast repository of ideas, you can decide what you want to try.

Step 5: Read Power → You and the Power Structure 

Choose one of your action statements, and keep in mind the tactics you're most excited about using to accomplish this goal. Think about how that power is moving around or building up. Consider:

How are decisions related to this issue made? Who makes them? Is there accountability, transparency, and participation by those most affected? Who influences the decision-making process, and what types of power do they use?

Sources of power at play	Conduits of power at play
➔ Who and what are the players?	➔ How is power being transferred/shared?

Laws of power in action
What laws of power do you see at work in or around your action statement and the issues that prompted you to create it?

➔ How do you notice power compounding?

➔ How do you notice power justifying itself?

➔ How do you notice new power able to be created?

Spend some time reflecting on your own power, in relation to this issue. Which sources of power do you have access to (directly or through people you know, or know of)? Could you activate or put any of them to use? Which are more out of reach? What other resources do you have (e.g. experience, time, skills, etc.)? What are barriers or obstacles you face?

Opportunities	Barriers
➔ What are ways you already have power?	➔ What are the limits or constraints to your power?

Power Mapping Axes

Beyond knowing your own opportunities and barriers, reading power accurately also means understanding the ways that others are interacting with your issue or idea.

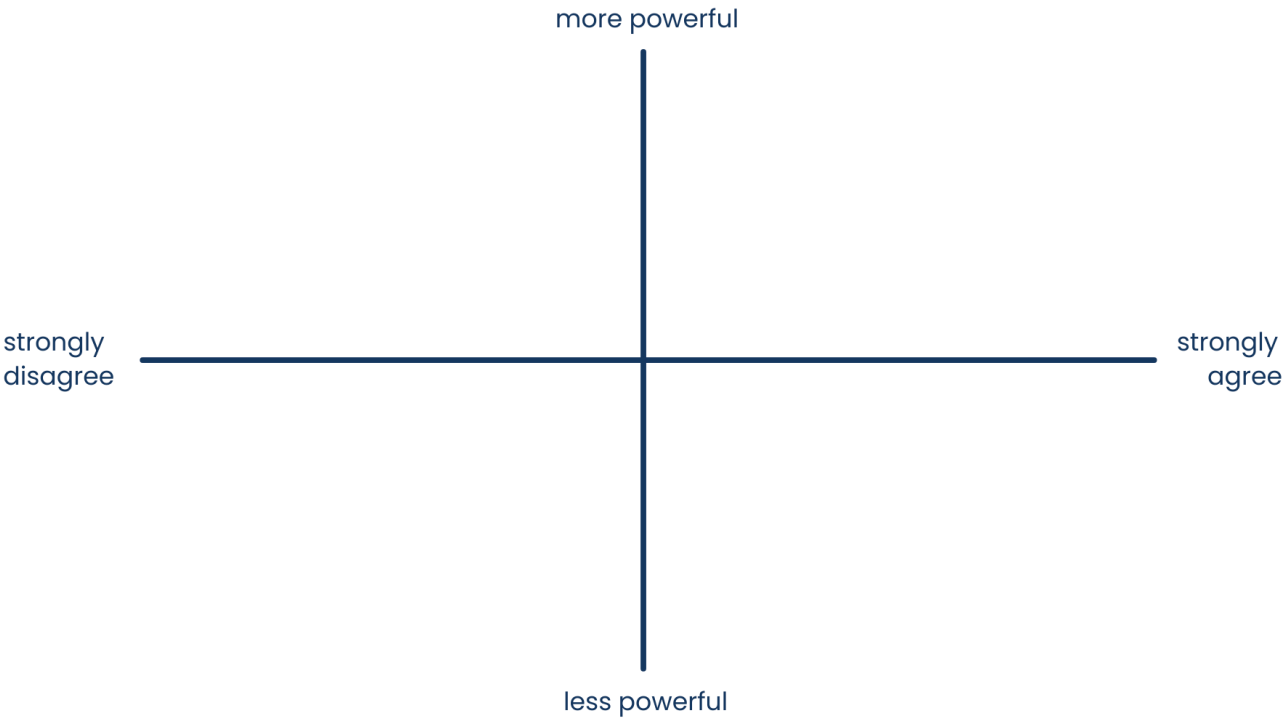
Start by identifying the main stakeholders. These stakeholders generally include: those responsible for creating the problem, those who have the power to fix the problem but are not doing so, those who are working to fix the problem—don't forget to include people directly and indirectly impacted by the problem—and yourself!

Research these stakeholders. There are some institutions on your list, but institutions don't make decisions, people do. So, you've got to find out who makes the decisions in those institutions. And then you've got to try to answer a few questions about these people: Do they agree or disagree with you on this issue? How much power do they have over this issue?

Practice

Plot where all the stakeholders stand on a chart like the one below: horizontally you'll mark how much this person agrees with you about your issue or idea, vertically you'll mark how much power they have. Consider adding some notes for yourself about the kind(s) of power they have. Depending on how supportive they are, and how much power they have over the issue, you can place each stakeholder on the board.

This can help you identify collaborators, allies, and people who you need to target in order to achieve your goals.



The power mapping axis are inspired by Beautiful Trouble: a book, strategy card deck, online toolbox and creative campaign incubator.

It is an international network of artist-activist-trainers helping grassroots movements become more creative and effective. Learn more at beautifultrouble.org/

Practicing Power Together

Consider

Bring to mind an issue or a community need that you care about, or something that you're currently directing energy towards in your professional and/or civic life. Then, think through the questions below. Together, your answers will help you develop a smart strategy for building (practicing) civic power, to take action on the issue (or any other!) using the Lessons of Power.

Note: This is a great resource to use after, or alongside the Personal Power Mapping packet earlier in this workbook. It is inspired by You're More Powerful than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen (2017), by Eric Liu. Find out more about the book at publicaffairsbooks.com/ titles/eric-liu/youre-more-powerful-than-you-think/9781541773660/

If power creates monopolies, and is winner-take-all you must…

Change the Game

Interrupt the cycle of self-perpetuating, compounding power.

Be able to diagnose the game as it is, to understand what's happening.

- ➔ What's going on?
- ➔ What has created this situation?

Identify which rules are rigged to reinforce the power of those who already have it.

- ➔ Who's invested in keeping things the way they are?
- ➔ How are they doing it?

Disrupt the strategies of those holding onto power; relentlessly swarm the status quo.

- ➔ How can you interrupt the status-quo? Identify strategic tactics.

If power tells stories to justify itself you must…

Change the Story

Rewrite and tell a different story about the situation.

More than critiquing the current situation, this requires dreaming of and describing an alternative.

- ➔ What's your vision for a better reality? Describe that alternative as if it exists, in present-tense!

Use your alternative story about how things can be better as the basis for all of your organizing.

- ➔ How can you share your vision so that it changes the public conversation surrounding your issue?

Pick a symbolic battle that can be understood as a representation of your entire cause.

- ➔ What's a well-known, or compelling situation in public life that helps make the case for your vision?

If people see power as limited and zero-sum you must…

Change the Equation

Create power by showing that getting involved is win-win; not for suckers.

Activate every citizen as a key player in your movement; make the attitudes and actions you're about contagious.

- ➔ How can you activate more and more people to talk about, advocate for, and work towards your vision?
- ➔ What strategies and tactics will mobilize them?

Create experiences that remind people of the power they have—and ask them to use it. Act reciprocally: give your power to those who will use it towards common goals. Motivate people by showing how this will help them, too.

- ➔ How can you remind people of their own power?
- ➔ How can you engage people in ways that build trust and deepen collaboration?
- ➔ How can you show people that their participation in your efforts is good for them, too?

Act powerful. When we act powerful, we become powerful. By acting powerful, you can remind yourself and others that power is infinite—it can be created where it doesn't yet exist.

- ➔ Remember that "in every instance of significant civic change, it is the majority that bends to a minority."
- ➔ How can you demonstrate power and strength to the public?

Civic Super Skill Reflection

Discuss

- ➔ How has today's learning sharpened your sense of how you want to build and practice power in your community, as a citizen?
- ➔ What does it mean to you, personally, to use power responsibly? Describe your ethics/moral commitments.

Ritual → Connect + Close

From Marcus Garvey:

"The ends you serve that are selfish will take you no further than yourself but the ends you serve that are for all, in common, will take you into eternity."



marcus garvey

Marcus Mosiah Garvey Sr. (1887–1940) was a Jamaican political activist, publisher, journalist, entrepreneur, and public speaker.

Homework

Read

From *You're More Powerful Than You Think* by Eric Liu

Open your copy of the book and read from PART IV: THE WHY OF POWER, p187-190.

scan this

Want to print this out to use later? Find the text of these pages by scanning this with a QR reader or going to qrco.de/why_power.

"A Center," by Ha Jin

You must hold your quiet center,
where you do what only you can do.
If others call you a maniac or a fool,
just let them wag their tongues.
If some praise your perseverance,
don't feel too happy about it—
only solitude is a lasting friend.

You must hold your distant center.
Don't move even if earth and heaven quake.
If others think you are insignificant,
that's because you haven't held on long enough.
As long as you stay put year after year,
eventually you will find a world
beginning to revolve around you.



ha jin

Xuefei Jin (Ha Jin) is a Chinese-American poet and novelist using the pen name Ha Jin (哈金). He was born and grew up in early communist China, and emigrated to the U.S. following the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Journal

Set a timer for 10 minutes, and do a free-write with one, two, or all three of the questions below. Keep writing—without editing yourself—until the alarm goes off.

- ➔ How can you find motivation or grounding when things seem overwhelming or bleak, as a citizen?
- ➔ How will you maintain your own integrity and commitment to the common good when you have a lot of power, or are building power? What will you do, to keep yourself accountable to others' well-being?
- ➔ If you're feeling skeptical about this whole idea of powerful, responsible citizenship, write about it! What's up for you?

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