

Identifying Leverage Points to Focus Action

The idea behind the identification of leverage points is the assumption that working in some areas can be more productive than others. A leverage point is a place where, if people focus their collaborative efforts, they can begin to shift a system because there is a new opportunity emerging for change. This new opportunity might be a new openness and awareness in people (for example, the recent focus on dismantling racism and white supremacy) or change in policy or in the availability of new resources.

Instead of simply working on the most important action, identification of leverage points is helping people look for something that is most likely to succeed, and will build new momentum for change. The opportunity makes it more likely that any action the group does will be successful and make a difference.

Often working in a leverage point will bring together new partners who will have different perspectives on the problem and when the leverage group discusses what to do, they often make breakthroughs in the way they think about the problem or issue.

Another important aspect to leverage points is that they will start shifting the system on several different levels simultaneously. For example, when a group I worked with recently decided to work on dismantling racism and white supremacy, they read the [article by Tema Okun](#), then discussed how they saw examples of white supremacy culture in their own behavior and talked about how they could shift that behavior. They took a network values survey that helped them see their strengths and challenges as a group around interacting in new ways and generated a set of actions to shift as a group. They also talked about how they could bring this awareness back to their organizations and communities.

Some networks do a system mapping activity to identify leverage points but this a process that takes more time. If you are interested in this, you can check out the course on [System Mapping](#) offered at no cost by Acumen.

Leverage Point Identification Activity

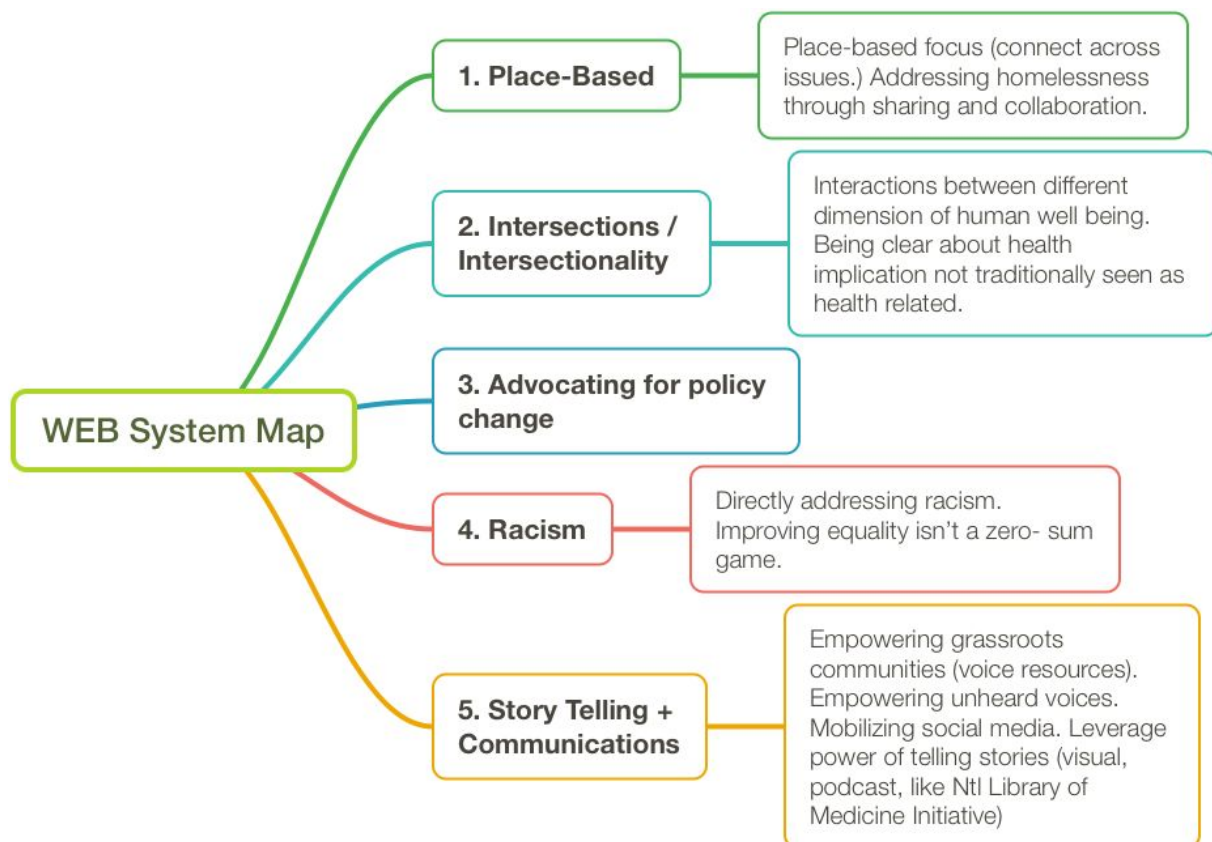
This is a simplified way to help networks identify focal areas for their collaborative efforts. It can be done virtually during a zoom call or at a face-to-face gathering.

Ask a group of people:

- Where are the places where you think our network might focus its efforts to shift the system?
- What actions could most make a difference?
- Where has some new opportunity opened up that could make change easier and more likely?

Activity on Zoom

If you are on a zoom session you can have participants put their responses in the chat. Have someone cut and paste those responses into a powerpoint slide that is being shared with the group. That person should then cluster responses and give each cluster a name. The slide below shows an example from a [Well-being and Equity Bridging Network](#) session.



Then have each participant either put in the chat the number of the group they would like to be in, and one of the facilitators can pull their name to the breakout room number that corresponds. The facilitators provide a link in the chat to a google doc. (For more information on using breakout rooms in zoom [click here](#))

The google doc has a page for each group (use page break to separate the pages for each group) and a set of questions for each group to discuss.

Here is the list of questions the WEB Network used:

1. Why is this an important leverage point that bridges wellbeing and equity?
2. What is your interest and/or involvement in this currently?
3. Do we currently have the connections in this network, if no how could we be proactive in reaching out?
4. What skills in network/collaborative project leadership would people need to work in this leverage point?
5. If projects/local networks were to come together around this leverage point, what would they need to do this?

The groups can be in the breakout rooms for 30-45 minutes. Make sure they do introductions in each group, select a notetaker and facilitator, and get someone to report back to the full group. At the end of the breakout room session, ask the participants to decide whether they want another session on the topic. If they do, ask for someone to be the liaison with the session facilitators to set up a next session. This can become the start of a working group.

When the group returns have them do a brief summary of their discussion. Once all have given their summary, ask participants to note connections among their leverage points: how could they reinforce and support each other?

Note that the liaisons will be working with the session facilitators to set up next times to talk.

Face-to-face Leverage Point Activity

Have participants put their leverage point suggestion on a PostIt Note then put them on a designated empty wall space and take a 15 minute break. As for people to volunteer to cluster the PostIt notes so that similar posts are together. Give each cluster a name (see example above) and put the PostIts on a Table Tent or piece of heavy paper or cardboard folded over like a tent.

As people return, have them look for their topic and join that table. Make sure that the group at each table does a round of introductions, then selects a facilitator and notetaker. You could have people take notes on a chart paper as well as on a google doc. The groups can be in the breakout groups for 30-45 minutes.

At the end of the breakout room session, ask the participants to decide whether they want another session on the topic. If they do, have them record on the note-taking sheet whether they want to be an Activator, Supporter or Observer. This can become the start of a working group. Here is an example of the [note-taking guide](#) used by the WEB Network.

Have the participants do a gallery walk to see each other's posters. One person from each group will need to stay with their chart paper. The rest can visit several of the other posters, asking questions, noting connections with their group, and deciding if they might want to join that group.

Once participants return to their tables, ask participants to note connections among their leverage points: how could they reinforce and support each other?

Note that the Activators will be working with the session facilitators to set up next times to talk.