

Spectrum of Allies

Format

A study of the barometer of social forces and groups, spread across the spectrum from those who are the most dedicated opponents to those who are the most active supporters.

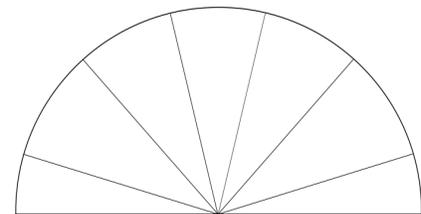
Goals

- ▶ To uncover how tactics need to be planned in relation to whether they attract key allies;
- ▶ To invite people into the fascinating complexity of strategizing;
- ▶ To encourage more optimistic mobilization efforts through a realization that it is not necessary to win over the opposition to our point of view;
- ▶ To assess where a group needs to do more research related to allies.

Step 1. Model the tool in the front of the room

Use newsprint to describe the idea that in most social change situations there is a struggle between those who want the change and those who don't.

Those who want the change are represented by a point at one side of the sheet (say, on the left), and the opponents by a point at the other side. Explain that societies (or towns, or states) usually include a range of groups that can be put on a kind of spectrum from closest to the point of view of the advocates to farthest away, and draw a horizontal line to represent that.



Then draw a half-moon or half a pie with wedges (as on the handout). *Don't distribute the handout yet.*

Ask for an example of an issue that people in the group might be working on. Suggest a demand we might have and ask who in society might be inclined to be most supportive, least supportive, and in the middle.

Give examples of different groups: "unions?" "poor people's groups?" "Chamber of Commerce?" etc. As participants identify groups and their location on the spectrum, write them into the "pie." If people suggest groups that end up in two or three wedges, then tell them they need to break down the group into a more specific chunk (e.g. "the public" is way too large!).

Do this only enough to make the idea clear.

Step 2. Explain a few benefits of this tool

Give the good news: in most social change campaigns it is not necessary to win the opponent to your point of view, even if the powerholders are the opponent. It is only necessary to move some or all of the pie wedges one step in your direction.

Pause to let the idea sink in and make sure it is understood. If we shift each wedge one step, we are likely to win, even though the hardliners on the other side don't budge.

Then, if appropriate to the group, complicate the picture slightly: Sometimes polarization happens, and the wedges closest to the opponent move away from you and toward the opponent. You can still win, if enough of society takes a step in your direction.

Let the group digest the good news for a bit. Let it sink in that activists often have the mistaken idea that they need to win everyone (inviting despair). Or that their whole attention needs to be on the powerholders (again inviting despair).

When the organizers bring that basically optimistic attitude toward the task of mobilization, then it is a lot easier to get people on board. Also, the multiplicity of roles (because of the multiple kinds of actions that can reach folks at different points in the spectrum) gives everyone a way to plug into the campaign, rather than everyone having, for example, to lobby politicians or be dragged to jail.

Step 3. Have people fill out the chart

Pass out the basic chart and invite everyone to fill in the wedges for their particular campaign/issue/movement. Create small groups for discussion. If a variety of issues are present in the group, ask them to form issue groups to compare notes.

Step 4. Review learnings and lessons

Harvest the learning in the whole group, using newsprint. Emphasize points like this:

- ▶ It is a huge win if you can get a group that was slightly hostile to move into neutrality.
- ▶ It is a huge win if you can get the group/wedge next to your end of the spectrum to move into activism with you.
- ▶ It is usually not necessary to move the opponents a step toward you in order to win, although it can hasten the win.
- ▶ This tool can be a research identification tool, to see where you need to know more.
- ▶ Notice the culture of your organization based on which wedges it was easier to identify than others.
- ▶ Debate and discussion when using this tool is valuable.

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