

Mapping policy-makers, influencers and other stakeholders

Time: Generally takes 2-3 hours for one project.

Resources: Requires one large piece of flip chart paper, post it notes (20), marker pens, sticker dots (30) and approximately 3-10 people participating. A facilitator can be helpful.

What is the purpose: Understanding who your key policy stakeholders are, their relationships with one another and their attitudes to your project, is a key first step to improving your project's policy influence. Developing 'maps' of how well the various stakeholders are aligned with the project's aims, how much interest they have in the issue, and how much influence they have, is a valuable exercise. Ultimately, it is through them that change will happen. The tool then allows you to start to develop strategies and courses of action for the different stakeholder groups and refine your policy engagement objectives.

The Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix (AIIM)

The RAPID team at ODI uses AIIM extensively in workshops with researchers and their collaborators. It can be done at any stage of the project: in the initial stages to understand the scope of possible engagement, or part way through to consolidate a team's thinking about who is involved and how they can sequence their communication and engagement activities as results begin to emerge. It can also be used to look back retrospectively at a project, as a monitoring and evaluation tool to track progress. AIIM is best developed in a group setting; the point is not just to produce a map, but to use the mapping process to focus discussions around who might be interested in the results of your work and the different ways you could engage with them. It can also help identify gaps which might otherwise be 'blind spots' in terms of new or emerging audiences, or potential enablers or blockers of change. For mental health this can also help to identify different groups inhibited by barriers such as stigma and help think about ways to overcome this.

Alignment: is the project likely to lead to change that the stakeholder broadly agrees with? Do they share the same sense of its importance?

Interest: are they committing resources to this issue? Do they want something to happen? Are they speaking openly about it?

Influence: to what degree can they sway the debate? Are they in a position of authority and can they use it to put pressure on decision-making?

Examples of these: *High alignment/low interest* would be a stakeholder that broadly shares the same objective but is unable or unwilling to commit resources to it—such as a civil society organisation with a very limited budget, or an NGO for whom the issue is just appearing on the agenda and so has no budget to assist you. *Low alignment/high interest* would be a stakeholder that has an interest in the same area as your project, but with an opposing objective—such as other health sector NGOs competing for budget, or a religious leader who believes that symptoms of mental illness have supernatural causes and that projects interfere.

Box 1. Alignment, interest and influence: definitions

How to do it:

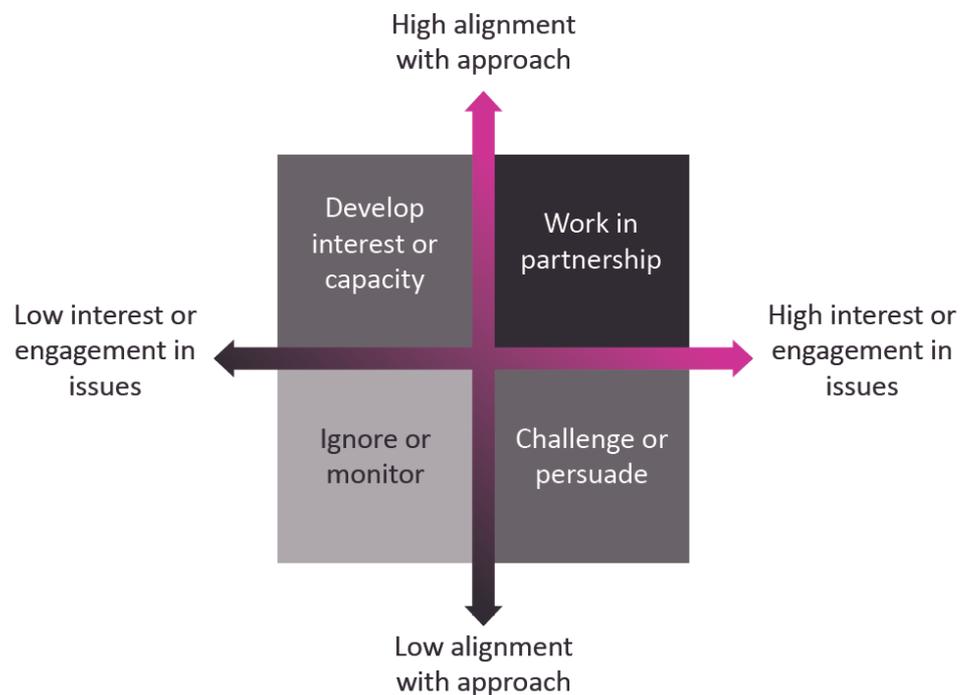


Fig 1: The Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM).

The steps:

1. In your group, discuss and identify your project's overall policy objective. For example, is it to produce precise recommendations on local mental health policy (or behaviours), or to provide evidence about a range of options that policy-makers need to consider? Be as specific as possible.
 2. Put the piece of flip chart paper on the wall or somewhere accessible, and appoint a scribe who has the marker pen.
 3. Draw two axes on the paper – the horizontal axis is for level of interest, the vertical is for level of alignment with the objective. This is your 'AIIM stakeholder map'.
 4. With reference to your policy objective, get everyone in the team to list all the stakeholders they can think of - writing each one on a post-it note. As a starting point, this could include stakeholders like government partners (e.g. Ministry of Health officials), local community leaders, private sector actors, media, donors and healthcare workers. Don't just list 'donors' on a post-it note, but actually name the specific donors on different post-it notes.
 5. Begin placing the post it notes onto the AIIM map. Their absolute position is less important than their positions relative to each other. Each person placing a post-it note onto the map should explain to the group why they are placing the post-it note in that position. This should stimulate either agreement or discussion from the group.
 6. Don't be limited to a single post-it per organisation: if different teams or people have different degrees of alignment or influence, separate them out.
 7. If the project is working in more than one country, or at both national and international levels, it is best to do an AIIM for each.
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8. Start to consider what groupings are on the matrix. Which quadrant are they in and what does that imply?
- i) Those stakeholders in the top right quadrant ('working in partnership'), are the kinds of actors with which you might like to form a 'community of practice'— after all, they agree with you and have a lot of interest in the topic. You could share ideas, coordinate information, co-organise events, swap readings or contacts. Stakeholders from this group could also become champions to advocate for your project within government or in the broader policy realm. See '[Accessing champions](#)'.
 - ii) Those in the top left quadrant ('develop interest or capacity'), are the kind of stakeholders you might like to energise or motivate. They agree with you, they are simply not that motivated or they have greater priorities. You could start to engage with them and develop a communications plan, share human-interest stories, reach out via the media and develop general advocacy work.
 - iii) Those in the bottom right quadrant ('challenge or persuade'), are the kind of stakeholders you need to convince of your viewpoint. They are very aware of the topic and may be passionate, but they do not agree. Evidence often works best with this set of stakeholders, so establishing a pilot or forwarding results, stories of impact and engaging in debates can all help. Using champions to reach that group (sending your message through others) can be useful too. In some cases, there may not be very much you can do with these actors.
 - iv) Those in the lower left quadrant ('ignore or monitor'), are the kind of stakeholders who do not know much about the project, or if they do, they are not very interested and probably do not agree with your views. If they are not influential in your project's success, you may prefer to ignore them as a group. Ultimately, you cannot do everything and may need to focus your energies on the actors in the other three quadrants. It may also be hard to know who these actors are, because they might not even be known to you.
9. Start to draw arrows of where you would like the stakeholder to move across quadrants. Pick those that are most important to your project. Five or six is enough. Each of these arrows represents a potential engagement strategy later (tool 2 – developing a policy influence plan - goes into developing these engagement strategies in more detail), so you will want to restrict them to five or six in order to ensure that you have a manageable number of engagement strategies to consider.
10. Now use the sticker dots to categorise the post-it notes (still on the flip chart map). If you do not have sticker dots, then coloured pens or symbols can be used. The sticker dots symbolise power or influence. If an actor has a lot of power over your work, place three sticker dots on the post it note with their name. If they have medium influence, place two dots on the post-it note with their name. If they have limited influence, place one dot. If they have no influence, place none. These should help you to prioritise whom to focus your energies on.

Constructing the map in a group will ensure you consider the full range of people and organisations that need to be included. Listen to the opinions of different members of the group and tease out the reasoning for why people consider stakeholders to be in that position, or why they feel that actor is especially powerful.

What it might look like:

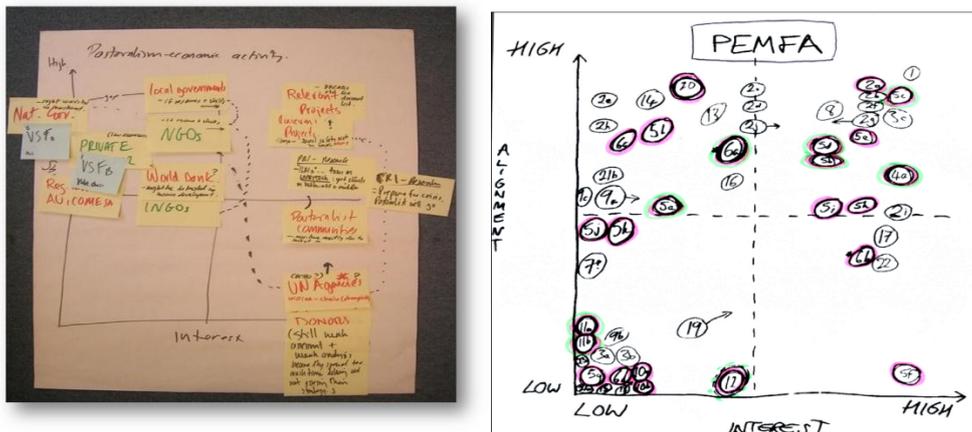


Image 1: Examples of an AIMM Map in action