

The PAI/LittleSis State Power Mapping Program



Introduction

The Public Accountability Initiative – more commonly known as LittleSis – State Power Mapping program supports base-building organizations and coalitions working to challenge corporate power at the state, regional, and local levels through political education and capacity-building trainings, producing and co-producing original research to support specific campaigns, and collaboration on campaign strategy and tactics.

Our ongoing State Power Mapping work is supporting campaigns to protect tenants' rights, challenge the influence of the ultra-rich in state and local government, combat the fossil fuel utilities' extracting wealth and short-circuiting the transition off of fossil fuels, and tax the rich to fund investments in social goods like housing, healthcare, education, and the environment.

Why State Power Mapping is a focus for LittleSis

Campaigns at the state and local level for social, ecological, and racial justice are critical for building power and cohesion within and among movement organizations. These fights are strategic because state and local decision-makers represent smaller groups of constituents, to whom they have closer relationships and must be more responsive, than federal policymakers. While this smaller scale means that corporate spending on political influence can go further, it also means that investments in state and local movement capacity can have outsized impact and organized campaigners using smart strategies and tactics can “punch above their weight” in fights against elite power. By researching and mapping power at the state and local level, campaigners can develop a shared analysis of the institutional actors standing in the way of local progress and create compelling counter-narratives to activate more people and score critical wins that make it easier to take on bigger fights. Winning key campaigns at the state and local level can build momentum within the movement and create conditions that are more conducive to effecting larger structural change.

At a moment when corporate power is ascendent at the national level, state and local fights are even more important for protecting the social safety net and building collective power towards a critical mass that is able to act at a larger scale.

Though they are of critical importance, these types of campaigns are frequently under-resourced compared to larger, national efforts. LittleSis's State Power Mapping program bolsters the strategic capacity of state and local base-building organizations through (1) directly producing or co-producing research to meet campaign needs, (2) growing the capacity of organizations and coalitions by training members and campaigners in research theories, methods, and tools that enable local organizers to more effectively conduct their own research and connect their knowledge of local conditions to larger structures of political power, and (3) partnering with campaigners to apply research to strategies and tactics informed by LittleSis researchers' campaign experience.

What we offer under the State Power Mapping program

- **Building strategic research capacity.** We develop and conduct trainings for organization staff and members on mapping corporate and elite power at the state and local level, identifying strategic research questions, using power research tools and methods, and putting research into action for maximum impact.
- **Popular education.** We carry out workshops and webinars and put together resources in partnership with movement organizations to help organizers and campaigners better understand the corporate power structures they are up against and devise strategies for taking them on, all while developing a shared analysis of political and economic power.
- **Producing original research.** We produce original research responsive to the needs of movement partners' campaigns. Research products could include internally-facing documents or memoranda mapping campaign opponents, rapid-response research into a particular subject that arises in the midst of an ongoing campaign, or publicly-facing research reports aimed at the general public either co-released with partner organizations or independently by LittleSis.
- **Communications & narrative development.** LittleSis analysts can help campaigners communicate about corporate power and develop strategies to build and deploy counter-narratives about how the world should be. We can help shape talking points about campaign targets, present opposition research findings to the media and to a general audience, and shape testimony for legislative and regulatory hearings.
- **Coaching & collaboration.** We work in close collaboration with partner organizations to determine what type of research products – such as those mentioned in the five bullet points above – will be most valuable to partners' campaigns and how to most strategically use that research.

Examples of State Power Mapping at work

- **Supporting campaigns for tenants rights and progressive tax reform.** Our work has had a significant impact in state-level housing struggles against the power of the real estate industry. For example, working with the Invest in Our New York and Housing Justice for All coalitions, we produced original research on the impact of proposed tax reforms and on the political influence operations of New York's real estate industry. We helped to develop strategies to deploy this research on successful campaigns to generate billions of dollars in public revenues through taxes on the wealthy and enact a dramatic expansion of tenant rights across the state.
- **Challenging utility industry extraction and climate obstruction.** We work with partner organizations to identify and expose the oil and gas industry's extractive practices and efforts to stymie climate change mitigation efforts at the state level and beyond. For example, we have worked with organizers in Michigan on deep reports on the harms caused by and the political influence wielded by the state's largest utility corporations, aiding an ongoing campaign to stop electric rate hikes and curb the corporations' ability to block, delay, and water down climate legislation. We have also worked with groups opposing fossil fuel and utility corporate power in New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Indiana.
- **Challenging influence of billionaires.** Research on billionaires, their expanding wealth, and the political influence it can buy has been used by state and local campaigns to challenge that influence and make the ultra-rich pay their fair share to contribute to society. In Pennsylvania, we contributed power analysis and research on Philadelphia-based billionaire Jeff Yass that has been integral to statewide coalition work to educate the public about Yass's influence and political interests and to challenge lawmakers from both major parties taking Yass's money and advancing his agenda. In New York, we have exposed the extent of billionaire wealth and huge amounts of political spending in support of campaigns to tax the ultra-rich to fund investment in social infrastructure.
- **Training and capacity-building.** LittleSis develops training programs and curricula to train organization staff and members how to use state-specific research tools for campaign research, how to deploy this research in campaigns, and how to communicate research to target audiences. For example, we ran a power research training curriculum to support a cohort of organizers in the Florida for All coalition over several months in 2024 as well as a more broadly-targeted public series called Research Tools for Organizers that was attended by hundreds of people from a variety of geographies.