

# Community Ideas Festival: Ecosystem Mapping

April 30, 2026



# What Is Ecosystem Mapping?

- **What is an ecosystem? From Merriam-Webster, an ecosystem is something (such as a network of businesses) considered to resemble an ecological ecosystem especially because of its complex interdependent parts**
- **An ecosystem map is a visual depiction of the ‘landscape’ within which an initiative operates.**
- **Creating a map of your issue’s ecosystem can be a useful way to identify larger systemic issues and problems at play.**
- **It can also help to reveal the complexity and dynamics between various elements within the system.**

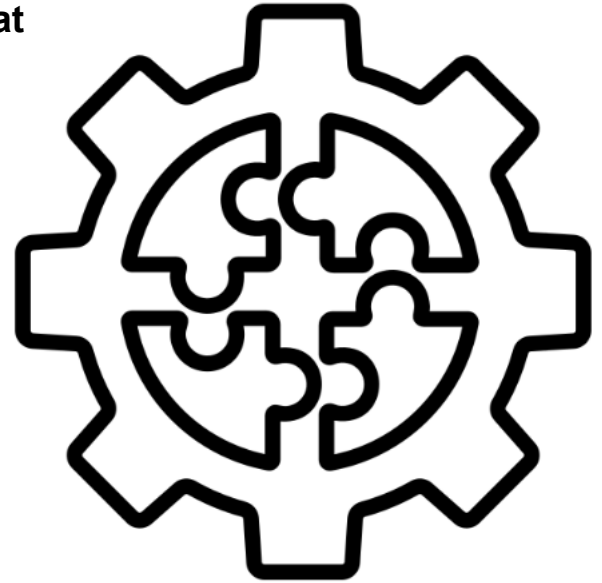


# Making sense of complexity

When we depict an ecosystem in the form of a visual map, it can be an important step in learning and understanding that can reveal insights, connections, leverage and breakthroughs for affecting your issue.

This will help us:

- Identify gaps in essential services and functions
- Strategize beyond symptoms of an issue
- Discover the larger systemic issues and dynamics between elements
- Establish an effective scope for your work.



# Why is Ecosystem Mapping Important?

## 1. Improves Collaboration

Understanding how stakeholders interact helps reduce silos, foster partnerships, and align efforts toward common objectives.

## 2. Identifies Gaps and Opportunities

By visually mapping relationships, you can spot missing connections, underutilized resources, and areas where new partnerships could be beneficial.

## 3. Enhances Strategic Decision-Making

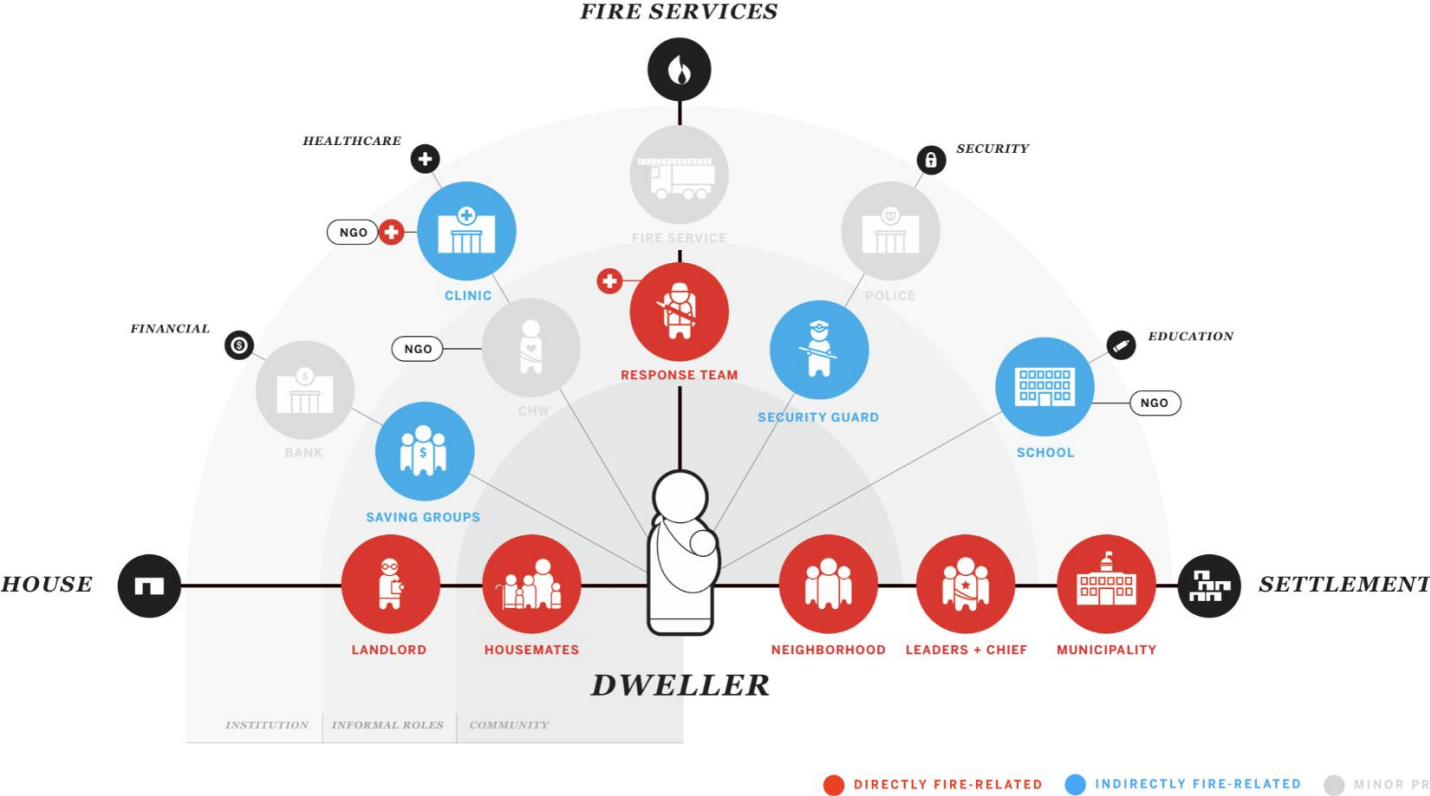
Leaders can use ecosystem maps to prioritize investments, allocate resources effectively, and strengthen key relationships.

## 4. Strengthens Network Resilience

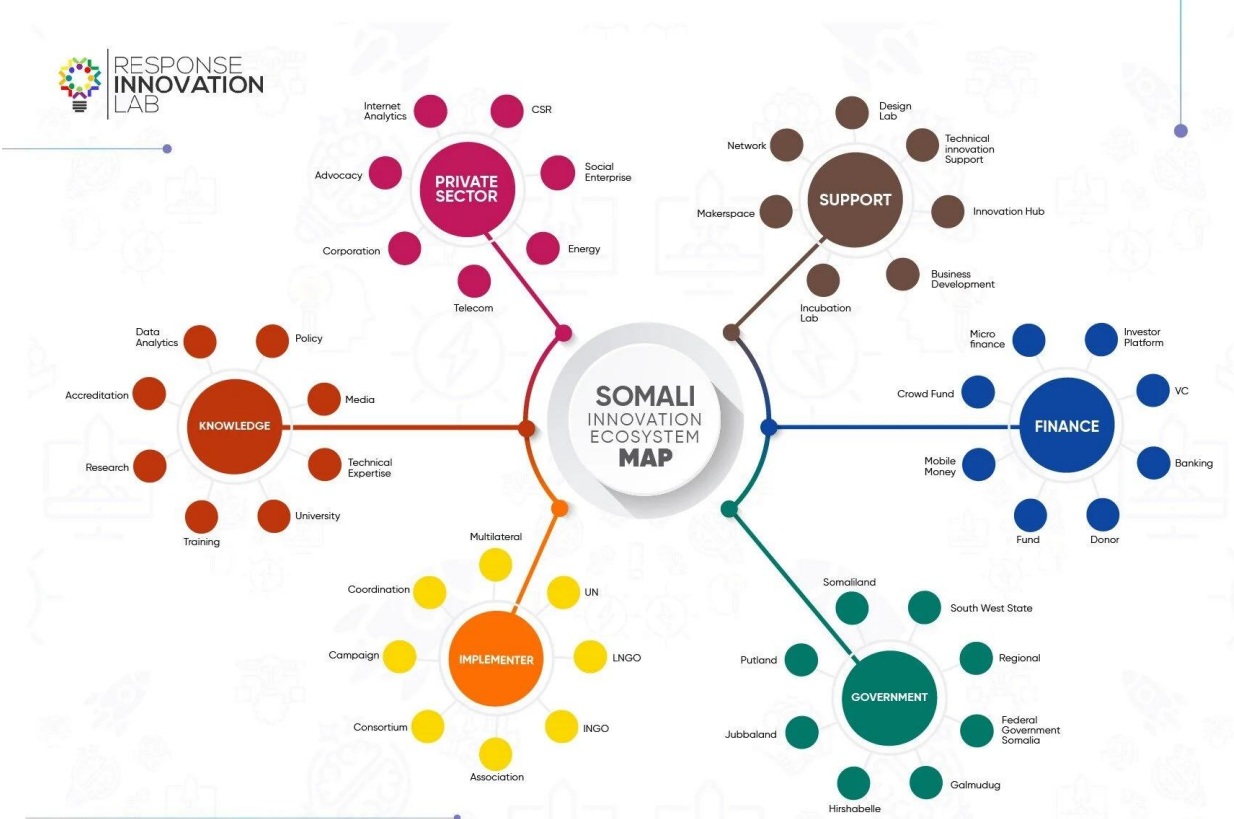
A well-connected ecosystem is more adaptable to change. Mapping helps ensure that relationships are diverse and not overly dependent on a few key players.



# Ecosystem Mapping Example

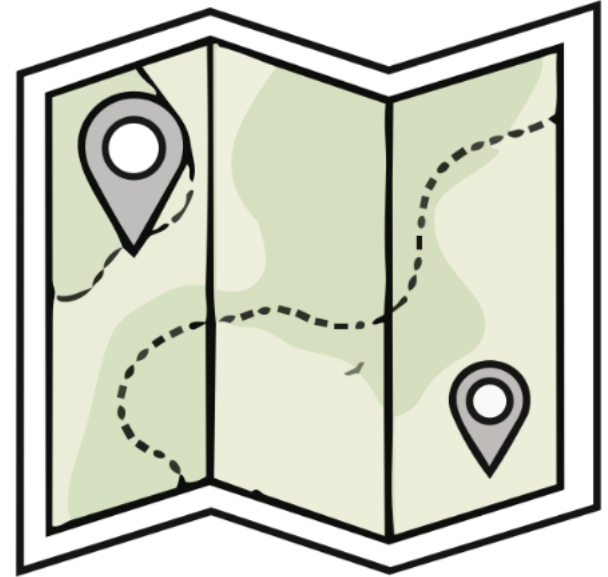


# Ecosystem Mapping Example 2



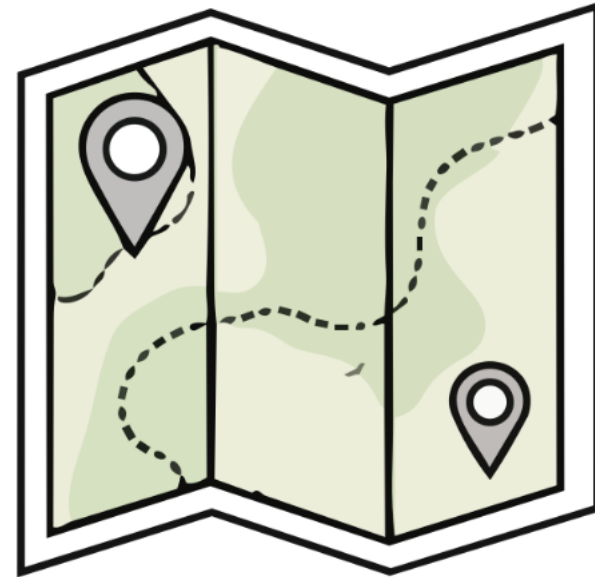
# Ecosystem Mapping – How To

1. Identify the players in your ecosystem (including yourself).
2. *Brainstorm a list of the conditions that affect your issue.*
3. *Create a visual map. Remember, there is no ONE right way!*
4. *Engage in Sense-making together. Remember your map is most useful if it helps to generate new insights and options for action.*



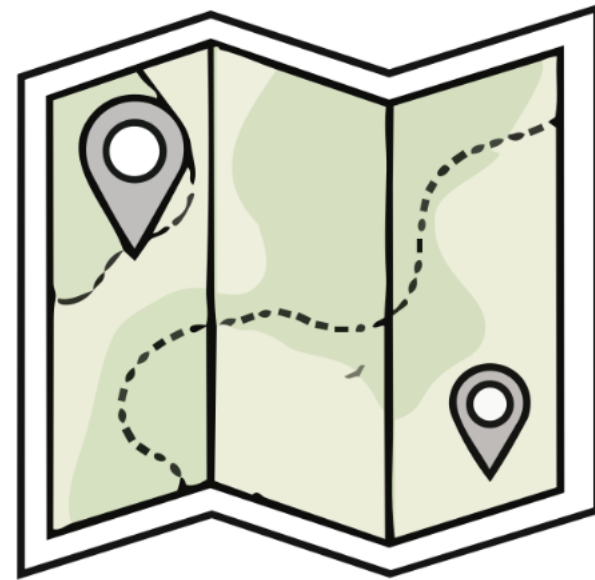
# Ecosystem Mapping – Identify the players

- **Resource Providers** – All people who contribute time, money, knowledge & information to your issue.
- **Key Allies & Complementary Movements** – These are your primary partners, allied organizations and complementary movements.
- **Key Stakeholders** – These are individuals/groups that stand to gain most from solving issue –including clients, beneficiaries, customers
- **Opponents & Problem-Makers** – These are the individuals & organizations that are actively working against you and/or creating the problem or making it worse.
- **Influential Bystanders** – These individuals have power and influence and aren't currently activated by your cause but who might be and/or those who are affected by your issue tangentially.



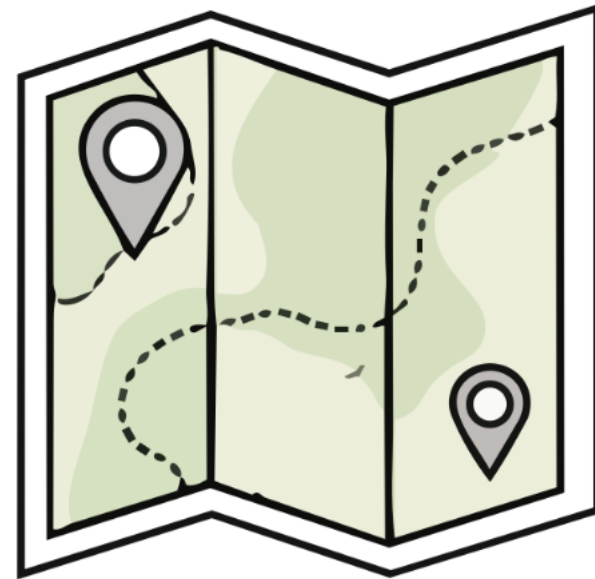
# Ecosystem Mapping – *Brainstorm a list of the conditions that affect your issue.*

- **Political and/or Administrative Processes & Structures** – This might include new laws, rules, regulations, processes, procedures, corruption
- **Economics** – This includes economic health, distribution of wealth, growth of markets, trends in fundraising
- **Geography & Infrastructure** – These includes factors such as physical location, transportation, communication, urban/rural/suburban issues
- **Societal Norms & Culture** – This includes: norms, beliefs, values, cultural memes, social networks, demographic trends.
- **Research** – This includes: scientific breakthroughs, relevant studies, impact trends



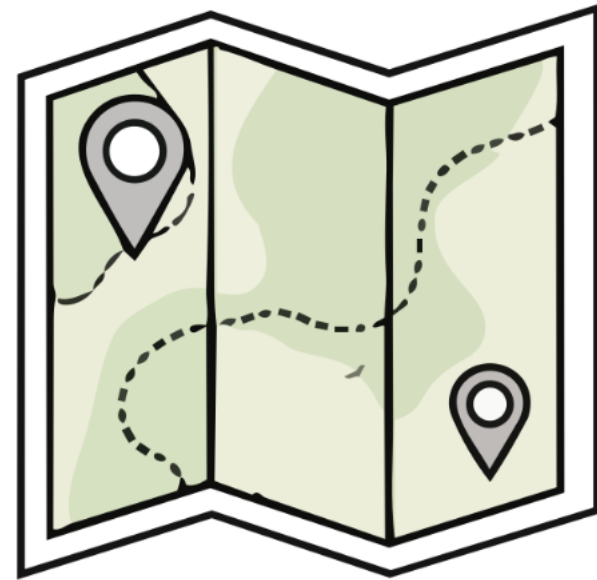
# Ecosystem Mapping – *Create a visual map (there is no ONE right way)*

- **Create Your Map Collaboratively** – Those involved in the strategy and planning for your initiative should be engaged in constructing the map together. Depending on the size of your group, you may co-construct a single map, or each develop drafts and then create a new, shared map that reflects the synergies and differences of the various maps.
- **Different People Have Different Styles** – As with all tools, some will find this easy and others will find it more difficult, some want lots of detail, others are satisfied with the basic elements. Acknowledging these differences may help all stay engaged in the map creation process.
- **Don't Over-Emphasize Your Own Organization's Role** – Be mindful of separating your organization/role from the issue. Becoming too focused on your own role can actually hinder the value of the process and prevent you from appreciating new relationships and dynamics



# Ecosystem Mapping – *Engage in Sense-making together*

- **Reflect upon the following questions:**
- What are the dilemmas or opportunities we see in our ecosystem map?
- What conditions in our environment most need to change in order to make headway on our issue, and how can we influence and encourage that change?
- Are there key players or roles missing from our ecosystem?
- Is/how is our innovation project (still) relevant?
- What new innovations or functions might we introduce to our ecosystem that would have the most/other related positive impacts?



# Breakout 1: WHO are the players in your Ecosystem?

- Resource Providers
- Key Allies & Complementary Movements
- Key Stakeholders
- Opponents & Problem-Makers
- Influential Bystanders
- *Who else should be in your map?*



## Breakout 2:

# WHAT are the list of conditions that affect your issue?

- **Political and/or Administrative Processes & Structures** – This might include new laws, rules, regulations, processes, procedures, corruption
- **Economics** – This includes economic health, distribution of wealth, growth of markets, trends in fundraising
- **Geography & Infrastructure** – These includes factors such as physical location, transportation, communication, urban/rural/suburban issues
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## Breakout 3:

# MAKE SENSE of your map: Analyze and interpret

What are the dilemmas or opportunities we see in your ecosystem map? Are there key players or roles missing from our ecosystem?

Look for emerging patterns in your ecosystem map, such as:

**Clusters:** Groups that collaborate closely

**Bridges:** Entities that connect separate parts of the network

**Gaps:** Areas with little to no connection

**Bottlenecks:** Over-reliance on a single entity

