

This tool is helpful for organizations working in collaborations.

Users will understand the various ways that different participation and communication styles in a group setting are perceived. The tool also encourages users to consider ways to share power in order to establish trust.

Sources of Power

1. **Positional power** comes from organizational authority or position (people providing capacity building technical support have this power). It is often forgotten by people with the power, rarely forgotten by those without it.
2. **Referred power** comes from connections to others (e.g., a staff member without formal positional power but has known the ED for years).
3. **Expert power** comes from wisdom, knowledge, experience and/or skills (e.g., someone is widely respected because of her skills as an organizer).
4. **Ideological power** comes from an idea, vision or analysis. As Victor Hugo said, "Nothing can withstand the power of an idea whose time has come." It can be an individual's original idea, an ideal such as "democracy" or "liberation," or a developed ideology.
5. **Obstructive power** stems from the ability to coerce or block. Whether implicit, threatened or demonstrated, those without other sources of power may depend on it. Many activists are experts in its use.
6. **Personal power** includes energy, vision, ability to communicate, capacity to influence, emotional intelligence, psychological savvy, etc.
7. **Co-powering** is an idea that comes from the Latino community. It speaks to the responsibility for individual leaders to mindfully work towards supporting the personal power of others through modeling, validating and giving feedback.
8. **Collaborative power** comes from our ability to join our energies in partnership with others in pairs, teams, organizations, communities, coalitions and movements.
9. **Institutional power** means economic, legal and political power directly wielded by institutions, whether it's a corporation, police department or one of your organizations. This institution exists apart from the individuals who work there at any one time and enjoys name recognition, membership, etc.
10. **Cultural power**, from the perspective of the dominant culture, means cultural norms, conditioning and privilege regarding race/class/gender/age. (As with positional power, this power is often invisible to the dominant group. To those with less power, it is a real and everyday experience.) From the perspective of oppressed peoples, cultural power means a consciousness of community, class or culture that serves to empower.
11. **Structural power** is power that's covertly or implicitly exercised through the dominant institutions of society (e.g., the resistance to alternative medicine from the AMA and insurance providers, racism expressed and maintained through structures such as red-lining by lending institutions).
12. **Transcendent power** comes from our connection to a higher power such as spiritual, natural and/or historical imperative.

This tool can be used for building a sense of community in a working group. To maximize effectiveness, consider using this tool as soon as you have a sense of the participants and the power dynamics that exist. To neutralize power differences, work with the group to establish group agreements, roles and strategies.

Minimizing Power Differences

Dealing with power differences in an open and honest way is a key ingredient to success in community building. This is not always easy but essential to building relationships.

- **Orient.** Effective orientation of new members helps to equalize power relationships.
- **Use ground rules or group agreements.** Ground rules or group agreements work best if they are developed by the entire group, acknowledged, hung in a prominent place during meetings/activities and periodically reviewed by the group to see if they are being honored or if there are additions or deletions.
- **Increase numbers of those with less power.** The best way to begin dealing with this is to have open discussions in your collaborative. If you are sincere about wanting to change the power dynamics of your group, you are the best experts on how to do this. For example, if you are looking to increase the number of parents of young children, you may have to change meetings to evening events with potlucks and childcare.
- **Make special preparations.** For example, schools and community based programs that successfully involve parents in decision making make special efforts to inform and orient them. Approaches include special training, meeting in advance in small groups of all or mostly parents, or one-on-one conversations with parent representatives before and after meetings.
- **Offer special support.** Transportation and childcare reimbursements and stipends are commonly needed supports for parents. Remember, professionals who attend your collaborative meetings may or may not have an institution that is covering their time and expenses. Participants experience these differences in support as part of the power relationship.
- **Listen to and respect all members.** As leader or member, your role-modeling can help equalize power relationships in the collaboration.
- **Be a relationship builder.** Help facilitate and establish personal relationships between leadership in the collaborative and those with less positional power. People need to know their ideas will be heard and respected.