



FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MODULE 3:

Building Community Power



Overview

BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER

When developing policies and programming, it is important to be mindful of how and when we engage communities, and to consider the context, history, and power dynamics at play. Understanding power dynamics requires us to analyze how power operates within any given situation or setting.

While power dynamics aren't inherently good or bad on their own, **power imbalances** (unequal relationships where power is held by certain groups and withheld from others) create many of the conditions and challenges that marginalized communities face.

Sustained imbalances in power are reinforced in systems and structures, and they deepen the persistent and avoidable inequities in opportunities and in health.

To correct power imbalances and achieve and sustain social change, we must begin with a systematic understanding of power.



IN THIS MODULE

We will explore core concepts related to power and consider our personal power and assets we bring to our public health practice.



Anytime you see this icon, you can download the worksheet for the respective activity.





What Is Power?

More than just authority, control, or domination, power is situational. This means that you might have power in one situation, yet be powerless in another.

Power might also be found in the collective action of individuals coming together for a common purpose or goal.

"Power is dynamic, relational, and multidimensional, changing according to its context, circumstance, and interest. Its expressions and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation."

— **RAJI HUNJAN AND JETHRO PETTIT,**
MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN



Reflection Questions

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What stands out to you about this definition of power?
- How is your own understanding of power similar to or different from this definition?



Expressions of Power

Processes to analyze and shift power would be limited without an understanding of the types or expressions of power. This can reinforce the untrue notion that people who hold less power in society are powerless to achieve change. However, this is not true. The figure below defines the **four expressions of power**:

POWER OVER	POWER TO	POWER WITHIN	POWER WITH
This type of power is built on force, coercion, domination and control, and motivates largely through fear. This form of power is built on a belief that power is a finite resource that can be held by individuals, and that some people have power and some people do not. ¹	Nearly every individual has the ability (power) to act in some way. From the relatively simple acts of speaking, moving, or listening, the individual has the power to make a difference in an outcome.	Everyone has an individual sense of self-worth, dignity, and values that they hold dear. When we gather in community, these same senses show up. By activating this form of power, we build the capacity to imagine, and to raise our aspirations toward change.	When individuals come together toward a common cause, they can act together, whether it be holding a bake sale or forming a union. Often this power increases as individuals build bridges with one another and begin resource and idea sharing.

By expanding our understanding of power, we can better examine the personal and professional assets we possess that can be transformed into power depending on the situation and context. We can also solidify the awareness that power lies not only within our own assets but also in collective assets. The assets — both individual and collective — can be used to enact systems change.

¹ <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/4-types-of-power/>



Power Mapping

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Power mapping is one way to assess the following:

- The **collective** influence, assets, and resources available to build the power of the community as a whole
- The power of **individual** people living in community to advance health equity

This process assists us in analyzing who or what holds power, how much influence they have, and where they (people, policies, practices, etc.) fall on the spectrum of values we wish to uphold.

The goal of power mapping is not to maintain the **status quo**; rather, by gathering and analyzing this information, we can **challenge our mental models** and **shift power** to individuals and groups who have less power or are underrepresented. By doing so, they can have greater influence and representation in decision-making around public health programming and policies that impact them.



Individual Power Mapping

The power mapping exercise on the next page is useful to help us understand the "power to" and "power within" that operates at the **individual level**.

PERSONAL POWER

When we examine the personal power we hold in our circles of influence, we see how we might use this power strategically, leveraging our power as we reflect on our places of influence, or stepping back in order to support others' leadership. Personal power is about our influence: How we can leverage our unique skills and the spaces and places we have access to in order to further equity in our communities?

By examining our personal power, we can begin to see power not as a “top-down” strategy, but as a tool to activate change upward, downward, or across by using our own personal power.





ACTIVITY

Individual Asset Mapping

Take 10 minutes to reflect upon and provide answers to the questions in each of the circles below. By doing so, you are practicing “individual-level power mapping” and should leave with a greater awareness of how your individual assets hold power. You can use this power, when needed, to leverage change.

Thinking about the positions you hold in various spaces, what role do you play within your organization, on committees, boards, councils, etc.? What does your network look like because of these roles?

Where do you spend your time? Have access to? Go during the day?



Power Mapping

How can we use the individual power map from the previous activity to activate this change?

When we map our power, we “build the power of the people” by better understanding how we might come together to share our influences, assets, and resources. It can also be applied more broadly to allow us to analyze who or what holds power or influence (besides ourselves).

Comparing these maps helps inform ways to strategically strengthen our relationships and allocate or advocate for resources.





Power Mapping

Remember as you do this work that you can examine power in all spaces, places, and locations you frequent. Every space we have access to is a space for change and power.

Simply by virtue of the fact that we are allowed, invited, or welcomed into the space, we hold the power to speak to and influence those sharing this space with us, and can extend a welcome to people, groups, or organizations that are still barred or dissuaded from entering this space.

Thank You!

