

Types and Sources of Power

Formal Power - power often tied to a formal position where the responsibilities of that position includes the ability to influence or make decisions affecting a community

Informal Power - power that is not tied to any position, often resulting from personal characteristics. This power allows the person/group to influence and/or represent a community without formal decision making.

Sources of formal or informal power:

- Resources - money, knowledge, skills, materials
Example - A local foundation can decide what issues and organizations should receive the foundation's resources.
 - Elected or appointed position
Example - A city council member can vote on decisions affecting citywide policy.
 - Community support and/or representation
Example - A well respected youth organizing group has the support of and can mobilize hundreds of local youth to speak out on an issue
 - Others' perception of power
Example - A local activist regularly tells decision-makers of his ability to mobilize large numbers in his community. Although this activist has limited support within the community, decision-makers often listen to and support his ideas.
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Personal Power - power resulting directly from the persons or persons representing a group

Sources of personal power:

- Expertise - knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the task
Example - A Youth Innovation Fund Board's extensive understanding of pressing issues in the community.
- Personal attraction - characteristics associated with likeability ("charisma" and ability to inspire)
Example - A teacher's passion and inspirational descriptions about the impact service-learning has had in her classroom

- Effort - dependability and evidence of higher than expected time commitment
Example - A Youth Innovation Fund grantee's demonstrated hard work and commitment to addressing a local issue
- Legitimacy - actions clearly display a particular value commonly held among partners
Example - A recently elected mayor's decision to implement the youth voice agenda on which she campaigned, as soon as she is in office.

Positional Power - power resulting directly from the position and tasks performed by a particular group

Sources of positional power:

- Centrality - access to information in a broad and diverse communication network
Example - A site coordinator's ongoing communication with young people, adults, local decision makers, community organizers, funders, other Youth Fund sites, etc.
- Flexibility - ability to improvise and innovate
Example - A Youth Innovation Fund Board's ability to identify and address the most pressing issues in a community
- Visibility - the number of "influential" people with whom a group interacts
Example - A Youth Innovation Fund Site's ability to interact with diverse influentials as a result of access to influential groups held by the various consortium partners
- Relevance - how much a group's work is connected to larger community's priorities
Example - A Youth Innovation Fund Youth Board addressing an issue identified as a pressing concern of youth and adults in the community