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.

**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 influencers 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