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Power Building Frameworks & Definitions

Prepared for the ECFC/RCCF Power Building Series Discussion at ECFC's May 2023 Member Meeting
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Primary Definitions

Power: The ability to define, set, or change situations. Power can manifest as personal or collective self-determination. Power is the ability to influence others to believe, behave, or adopt values as those in power desire. Although power is often conceptualized as power over other individuals or groups, other variations are power with (group's collective strength) and power within (individual's internal strength).

It is the ability to influence others and impose one's beliefs. All power is relational, and the different relationships either reinforce or disrupt one another...Power can be used malignantly and intentionally, but need not be, and individuals within a culture may benefit from power of which they are unaware.

Community Power: Community power is the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity. (Source: Leading Locally: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change)

Community Power Building: Community power building is the set of strategies used by communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity. Community power building is particularly critical for underserved, underrepresented, and historically marginalized communities who have been excluded from decision-making on the policies and practices that impact their health and the health of their communities. (Source: Leading Locally: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change)

Power & Places

This framework reflects the Interconnection among people power, communities/collectives power and governing/policy power.



From Innovation Network/Community Change: Power in Places Initiative Summary

Power Flower

CAPACITIES FOR CHANGE

Organizing and base-building:

Are central for historically excluded populations to have power, agency, and voice

Yet alone are insufficient to gain influence over decision-makers

Thus require an ecosystem of capacities tailored to achieve an inclusive democracy and to close health equity gaps



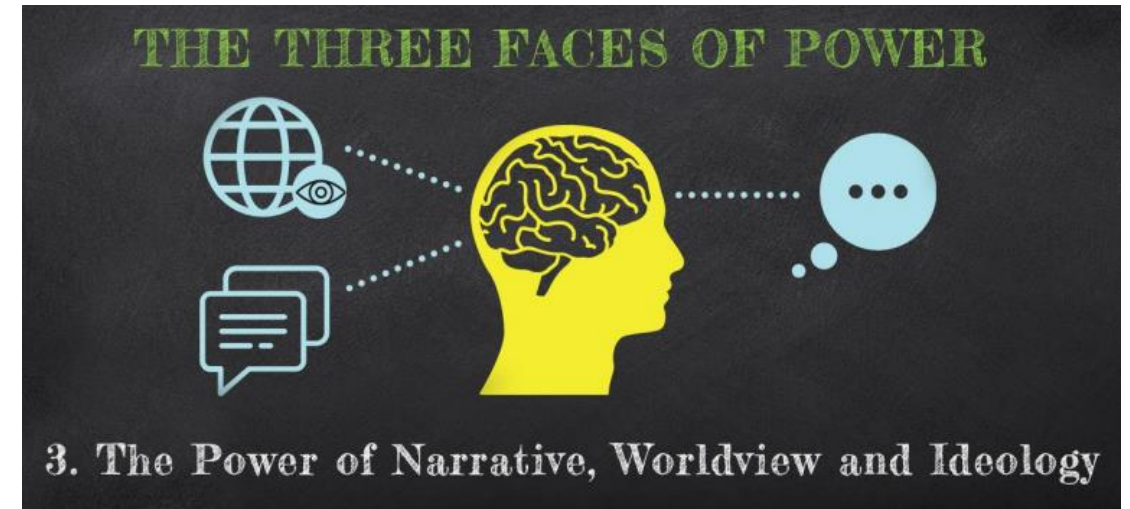
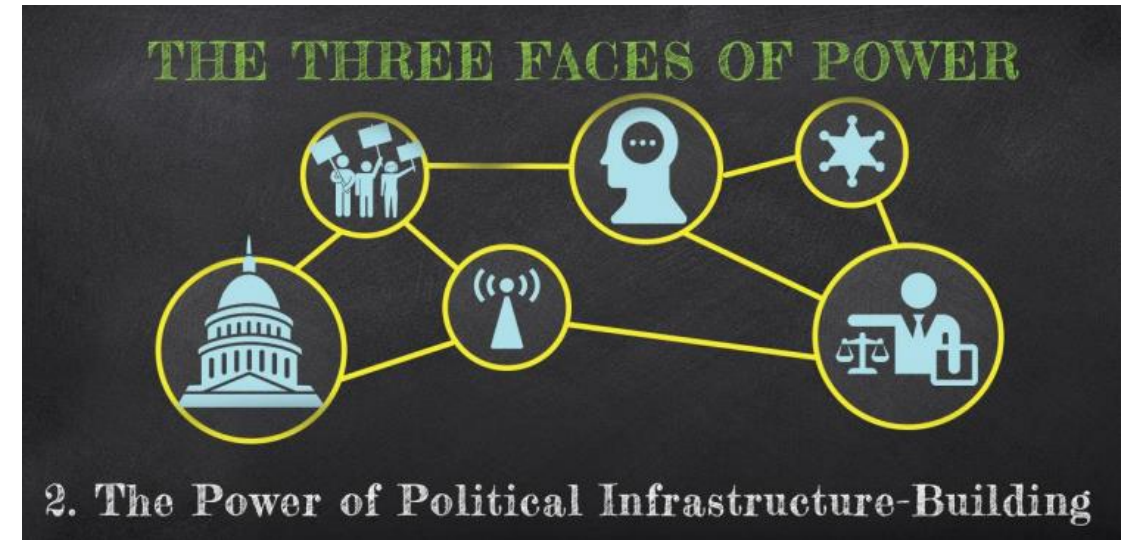
This diagram, developed by the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute, locates community power building at the center of a strategic ecosystem to be resourced and leveraged.

From [Leading Locally, A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change](#)

Three Faces of Power



“It’s not a deficit frame...no one gets to define us or our families except for us and our families, and we're very clear about how that element or attribute of self-defining narrative is powerful in its own right”



[From: Three Faces of Power, Grassroots Policy Project](#)

Other PowerBuilding Definitions

Base Building: A diverse set of strategies and methods to support community members to: be in relationship with one another; invest in each other's leadership; share a common identity shaped by similar experiences and an understanding of the root causes of their conditions; and to use their collective analysis to create solutions and strategize to achieve them. (Source: Leading Locally: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change)

Community Organizer: Community organizers, one type of staff person working at CPBOs, bring the most impacted communities together—through door knocking in neighborhoods and apartment buildings and through institutions like schools and churches—to learn and strategize about how to make, as multiple interviewees described, “material changes in their living conditions.”

While organizers across place and issue employ diverse ranges of tactics and strategies—from leadership development trainings to political education curricula to healing circles—it's about bringing people together to help them make connections across their lived experiences and conditions.

[Source: Leading Locally: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change]

Community Power Building Organizations (CPBOs): Organizations that may be identified by geography (local, state, regional, national), demography (e.g. youth, workers, multi-racial) or issue(s) (e.g. workers rights, environmental justice, multi-issue) who conduct a range of activities including base-building.

Other terms sometimes used to describe CBPOs include but are not limited to: grassroots organizing groups, social movement groups, movement-building organizations, community-based organizations, community organizing groups, base building groups.