

# Understanding power

**Aim: to create understanding of our own power as individuals and organisations, and how to share it more fairly and effectively.**

## WHY USE THIS TOOL?

To have structured conversations in order to:

- Understand and recognise our own power
- Understand and recognise the power within our own groups – personal, public and professional
- Share experiences with others to enable peer to peer learning
- Build an understanding of power and ways we can shift power in our practice so that decision-making and control is better shared

# Preparing for the activity

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## AN EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Gaunless Gateway Big Local had identified that there was very little time during meetings for any value based discussions. They held a series of facilitated workshops on the issues identified by Civil Societies Futures' set of practices and questions in respect of shifting power, being accountable, making deeper connections and building trust (PACT) - including one using this tool.

## PREPARING FOR THE ACTIVITY

- Print out, photocopy or draw the chart on page 5
- Review the expressions of power framework on the chart - make sure you're ready to explain this to the group

### YOU WILL NEED



A large room with a flipchart stand



Flipchart pens and paper



30 mins prep  
1 hour minimum to run the activity



Worksheets included, to be printed.

# Running the activity

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## 1. SET THE SCENE

Introduce the general theme of understanding power.

## 2. SET EXPECTATIONS

Remind everyone that the content remains confidential. The main conclusions and any action points agreed at the end do not need to be confidential.

## 3. PAIR UP AND SHARE STORIES

- Split the group into smaller groups of 2-4. Invite each person to share a personal story about 'power'.
- When they have shared, each smaller group needs to then come up with a headline for each story. Some examples are on page 3.

## 4. INTRODUCING THE FRAMEWORK

**Bring the group back together and introduce the chart.**

Explain the different 'expressions' on the chart.

**Ask participants** to decide where their headlines fit and write them on the chart. Invite participants to share why they put certain headlines with particular expressions.

## 5. DISCUSSION

As a bigger group, ask the participants to discuss examples of when they, as an organisation, have encouraged 'power with' and 'power within' in terms of the change they are aiming to achieve.

## 6. REFLECTIONS

To inspire participants about the next steps they could take, read out some of the 'I will' actions on page 4.

Ask the group to spend a few moments thinking of their own ideas and actions that they could take.

Bring everyone together to share their ideas and create a list.

# Headline examples

These are examples of headlines (in bold) that have been given to stories about power

- **When I say Jump**  
conflict of interest in family where the father is always expected to be obeyed.
- **Mother Knows Best**  
a new mum successfully challenged the advice of Health Visitor and made her own decisions.
- **Together, Tougher, Stronger**  
a story about one village who was already being heard reaching out to support another village to come together and join forces to get their collective voices heard, sustained by making both areas stronger.
- **North/South Divide**  
the coming together and giving positions technically making things look equal but never eradicating that the area with the majority had more power.

- **Doing it His Way**  
Sales team manager not listening to his team but imposing his way as the only way resulting in a dissatisfied team who would not go the extra mile for him.
- **Doing it My Way**  
Introduced a new way of working, took time and caught flak from others Initially change happened through much spoon feeding which can result in too much reliance and lack of thinking for self but won out in the end with a much happier sales team who understood what they were doing and were motivated to do it.
- **The Day I Became a County Councillor**  
not identifying the position as having power just wanting to help people but then realising that there was power attached through knowing more powerful people and being able to make financial decisions.

# Reflections and next steps

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Use these to help your group think about how to take their learning from this tool forwards - and come up with your own too.

## I WILL...

- Share my ideas more - speak up and take risks.
- Be more open to other people's views - hold more discussion topics exploring issues and solutions
- Keep going because some change is possible if we keep trying.
- Ask where the power lies and how that affects what I do - ask whose views are being heard and whose are not?
- Be more aware of when I/others are just going along with systems we've been conditioned to accept. I will ask is this because I think the system are better; more credible?
- Learn how to use power structures
- Understand and recognise my own power - look at how I behave when I feel powerless and powerful in situations
- Promote that meetings are open for discussion so that people can talk openly about their problems and how to work together to tackle them
- Question when I last stuck up for someone with less power than me
- Listen to those with lived experience of the problems we seek to address not just academics or experts.
- Be more aware of different levels of power I hold, and think more about power before undertaking anything
- Create connections between others and buy services from local groups and business - meeting space, catering etc.
- Try and effect small changes within organisations to enable a mechanism to exist which gives individuals at any level the opportunity to share ideas with the decision-maker
- Never stop asking for the reason why any decision is made.



This is one of a series of DIY tools created for the 150 communities taking part in the Big Local programme. Find out more at [www.localtrust.org.uk](http://www.localtrust.org.uk)

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# Chart for part 4 of the activity

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Expression	What does it mean in practice?	Examples	Any other observations
<b>'Power over'</b>	Exercising control over other people through the use of formal authority and position and the dispensation of rewards and punishment		
<b>'Power to'</b> : individual ability to act	This is rooted in the belief that every individual has the 'power to' make a difference.		
<b>'Power with'</b> : collective action, the ability to act together	'Power with' helps build bridges across different interests, experiences and knowledge and is about bringing together resources and strategies.		
<b>'Power within'</b> : individual or collective sense of self-worth, value, dignity	Enhancing the 'power within' individuals build their capacities to imagine and raise aspirations about change.		